





# SIR PHEROZESHAH MEHTA

A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY

By

H. P. MODY, M.A., LL.B.

Author of

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### VISIT TO ENGLAND—THE IMPROVEMENT TRUST BILL. 1897-1898.

EARLY in the following year, Pherozechah's health began to grow worse. He had been suffering for some time from an affection of the kidney, which necessitated a somewhat prolonged rest from his labours, and he went accordingly to Matheran. He allowed himself to be re-elected to the Legislative Council in April, but it was evident that his participation in its deliberations would be of a fitful character. The Corporation, too, saw less and less of that familiar figure in his accustomed place to the right of the Municipal Secretary. His absence from Bombay at a critical time when Plague was raging in her midst, and when the rigorous measures taken to stamp it out were creating public alarm, was sharply criticized by some of his political opponents. Mr. Harmsworth, of the *Daily Mail*, who was touring the country, took his cue from them, and wrote to his paper condemning Pherozechah for not being at his post at a moment of danger. Judging from the way in

which he continued to control public movements even from a distance, his critics might be excused for not realizing that he was really very ill.

It was not before the pain which he suffered became somewhat acute that Pherozeshah could be prevailed upon to call in a consultant. With that curious nervous dread which characterized him, he had so far avoided submitting himself to a proper examination. When he at length allowed his trouble to be seen to, it was found that a stone had formed in the bladder, and that an operation would have to be necessary. As it could not with safety be performed in Bombay, where Plague was violently raging, Pherozeshah was advised to proceed to England, which he consented to do after some hesitation. At his desire, it was arranged he was to be accompanied by his close friends, Mr. and Mrs. C. M. Cursetjee and their two daughters, and by Dr. Khory, an old friend and a medical practitioner of considerable experience. The necessary arrangements were made, and Pherozeshah left by the mail steamer on the 15th May, 1897. His hold upon the public was evidenced by the very genuine expressions of regret at his departure from the Indian Press and from his fellow-workers in all parts of the country.

The voyage was dull and uneventful. Pheroze-shah was a bad sailor, and did not venture on the deck very often, confining himself generally to

his cabin. He had a seat assigned to him next to the Captain on the main table, but he availed himself of the privilege only once, preferring either his cabin, or the company of the friends he had on the voyage with him. London was reached on the 3rd June. There, Dr. H. M. Masina, who was reading for his final F.R.C.S. examination, met the party, and the case was placed in his hands. As Pherozechah would not entertain the idea of going to a hospital, a house was rented at Watford, a few miles from London.

The operation was performed by Dr. Frayer, formerly of Hyderabad, Deccan, who was a recognized specialist in the treatment of kidney and stone troubles. He came down to Watford with a chloroformist, a nurse and a somewhat formidable array of cases, containing instruments, bandages and other necessary things. The operation was successfully performed, and the patient was ordered to take complete rest for a couple of months. He needed it badly, and was not averse to taking it. It was a trying period for one who had such an active mind, but it did him a world of good. When he was able to move about freely towards the middle of August, the party went straight to Brussels, and thence by slow stages to Lucerne, Lausanne and Geneva. At Lucerne, Dr. Khory, who had all through taken considerable pains over the case, left his patient and returned to Bombay.

Pherozechah's mode of life during his travels was very much what it was in his own home in Bombay or Matheran. It was characterized by the same luxuriousness and extravagance which he loved to indulge in wherever he went. He travelled with an alarming quantity of luggage, and stayed at the best hotels. He would send for a hair-dresser from the smartest establishment in the place to shave him and do his hair. His fondness for cosmetics, face-washes and powders was well known, and he indulged in these feminine tastes to his heart's content. He affected the most expensive clothes, and was always particular in dressing for dinner even in out of the way places, where tourists love to discard some of the conventions of civilization.

With equal disregard of place and circumstance, Pherozechah would keep to his usual habits. He would rise late, and spend his morning between breakfast and the performance of his elaborate toilet. He did not care for sight-seeing, and was indifferent to historical associations. He mostly kept his own company, and seldom mixed with the people he met on his travels. His only enjoyment was a long drive before dinner. His fastidiousness with regard to food was extraordinary, and was persisted in wherever he went. Ordinary drinking water in a strange place he looked on with horror, and he would not touch it even in places noted for the

purity of their water supply. He was also particular about his tea and tobacco, which he generally carried with him in a chest, regardless of customs dues and considerations of a like character, which never seemed to trouble him. There were few things he relished more than a good cigar after dinner, when he retired to the seclusion of his room, and lay in an easy-chair with a pile of papers and some favourite volume near at hand. He always carried his Thackeray and Dickens with him, and a tattered edition of the Bible.

When later the party made a long stay in Paris and London, things were much the same. Pheroze-shah mostly kept to himself except when he met some old Bombay friends, \*such as Sir Charles Sargent and Lady Souter, who happened to be staying at the same hotel in Paris, and who made much of him. In London, he occasionally saw Lord Reay, Sir William Wedderburn and one or two other friends. He took no notice of the great world around him, and its distractions and gaieties made no appeal to him. He preferred to spend his afternoons in long drives to the suburbs. Politics he eschewed as scrupulously as he did society and its amusements, and only once visited the Congress Committee rooms. The state of his health necessitated complete change of occupation as well as of place, and he followed the doctor's instructions only too thoroughly.

## II.

When he was in London in December, Pheroze-shah to the surprise of many of his friends, sent in the resignation of his seat on the Bombay Legislative Council. The step was in a sense forced upon him. In October, the Government of Lord Sandhurst inquired through Mr. Snow, the Municipal Commissioner, whether Pherozeshah was expected to return from Europe in time to take part in the discussion of the Improvement Trust Bill. It was suggested that if he could not come back in time, he should make room for some one else, as it was very important that the Corporation should be represented in the Council while a measure so vitally affecting its interests was under consideration. Pherozeshah was in Paris when he received a telegram from Mr. Snow on the subject. He wired back that he would decide as to the date of his return after consulting his physician in London. The latter having advised a stay till the end of January, Pherozeshah sent in the resignation of his seat on the Council.

There was at once a scramble for the vacancy. Quick upon one another, four candidates appeared in the field, Doctors Bahadurji and Cowasji Hormusji, and Messrs. Wacha and Ibrahim Rahimtulla. A vigorous campaign was carried on, and it seemed as if the election would prove an unusually



lively affair. Mr. Wacha, with that fine loyalty which characterized him, declared his intention of resigning, if elected, in favour of his friend and leader on his return to Bombay. Dr. Bahadurji and Mr. Ibrahim Rahimtulla in their turn offered to show their appreciation of Mr. Wacha's life-long devotion to the public cause by retiring in his favour, if the remaining candidate did the same. But nothing came of these pourparlers, and the man in the street looked forward to an exciting contest.

The friends of Pherozeshah, however, were led by the scramble to entertain doubts about the wisdom and the necessity of his resignation. They were influenced also by the fact that the Bill had not yet been introduced, and was not likely to be through the Select Committee stage by the middle of February, by which time Pherozeshah was expected to be back. They met and discussed the situation, and wired to Pherozeshah inquiring if he was willing to be re-elected. A similar telegram was sent by his friend Sir George Cotton, one of the most popular of Bombay's citizens, who was then President of the Corporation. Pherozeshah having wired his assent, all but one of the candidates promptly withdrew. Dr. Bahadurji alone remained, and he and his friends quietly yet sedulously continued to canvass, now that the field was left entirely open to them. Public feeling

was strongly on the side of the absent leader, however, and he was re-elected unanimously on the 6th January, 1898, Dr. Bahadurji withdrawing his nomination at the last moment.

There was general satisfaction that, in spite of many difficulties, the Corporation had the good sense and the good fortune to retain the services of its most eminent spokesman at a time when his vast experience and rare abilities were most needed. A demand had been voiced from many quarters that the introduction of the Bill should be postponed until his arrival in Bombay, and it was a matter of rejoicing that the City was not to be deprived of his guidance and leadership while questions closely affecting its interests were under consideration. *The Rast-Goftar*, it is true, thought that it was a sorry spectacle that the Corporation should depend upon one man and one man alone for guidance in matters of vital importance. But it was a feeling which was not shared by the public, which, so long as Jove chose to thunder, did not want any lesser deities.

Pherozechah returned to Bombay on the 12th February, and was welcomed by his friends at the Ballard Pier. He appeared greatly improved in health. The operation he had undergone had freed him from his complaint, and the complete rest he had enjoyed had restored him to vigour. His return was hailed with joy by the Press and the

public. The tragic events of the previous year—the murders of Captain Rand and Lieutenant Ayerst, the deportation of the Natus, the arrest and conviction of Mr. Tilak, and the measures of repression which followed the seditious outbreaks in the Deccan—had overwhelmed with sorrow and despair a population scourged by the ravages of plague and famine. It was a very difficult situation in every way, and confronted with it, the leaders of the people had felt helpless and paralysed. As a critic aptly put it :—

“Divided counsels and protracted discussions, hesitancy and diffidence were the order of the day, and many were the expressions of bitter regret that the one man who alone could have inspired confidence should have been unavoidably absent in England. Bombay without the Honourable Mr. Mehta was like the Liberal Party without its Gladstone. The parallel is exact. All the difficulties and disadvantages, which this great historical party has experienced by the retirement of its illustrious chief, were felt at every stage in this city owing to the absence of its foremost citizen. The experience was suggestive in the lessons it conveyed not only regarding the present, but about the future. His return is certain to bring back a feeling of confidence and

reassurance not only to this city, but also to the whole Presidency."

The Improvement Trust Bill came on for first reading at the meeting of the Legislative Council held at Bombay on the 14th February, 1898. Lord Sandhurst, who presided, made a graceful reference to the re-appearance of Pherozeshah at the Council table. The Bill in its provisions was of a most sweeping character. It aimed at creating a new Bombay by means of an agency distinct from the Municipal Corporation, which, for various reasons, was regarded as incapable of shouldering the burden. The frightful havoc which the Plague had wrought in her midst had laid bare to view the hideous slums of Bombay and the filth and squalor amidst which the majority of her citizens lived and died. It was like a whited sepulchre, and when it was exposed, there was a general feeling of amazement and horror. After the inevitable expenditure of energy on finding a scape-goat, everybody realized that a vigorous campaign was necessary in order to stamp out insanitation and disease, and the Bill before the Council was the outcome of the agitation to raise a new Bombay on the ashes of the old. By the introduction of the measure, it was sought to create a Trust, armed with wide powers, and financed partly by Government and partly by the Corporation. There were those like Mr. Wacha,

who felt that a separate organization was uncalled for, and that the Corporation, rid of certain checks and restrictions on its authority, and placed in possession of larger funds was quite competent to undertake the work. But the general verdict was against them, and the main features of the Bill received the blessings of official and non-official members alike.

On behalf of the Opposition, Pherozechah gave the measure a general approval, though he did not feel himself competent to discuss its provisions in view of the fact that he had returned from Europe only two days before. He did not agree with those who thought it was an attack upon the constitution of the Corporation. Speaking from his intimate acquaintance with the Municipal Act, he was of opinion that it had always been contemplated that special and exceptional occasions might arise on which it might be deemed desirable not to entrust the direct work of carrying out certain duties to a body constituted as the Corporation was, but that it might be found necessary to delegate such tasks to an organization composed in a somewhat different way. He pointed in support of this argument to the provisions deliberately introduced into the Municipal Act relating to the appointment of the Joint Schools Committee. He would have preferred it if the Trust had been called by some name which might have brought it

more in harmony with the nomenclature of committees such as were contemplated in the Act. The constitution of the new body might with advantage have proceeded on somewhat similar lines as that of the Joint Schools Committee. With regard to other parts of the Bill, Pherozeshah was anxious that the ratepayers should have some knowledge of the financial liabilities involved in the proposals. He was also somewhat uneasy about the large powers left in the hands of Government, and urged that care should be taken not to make the Board a mere department of the latter. Subject to these and like reservations, he welcomed the measure, and hoped it might be the foundation for the reconstruction of the city in a way for which future generations would be grateful to the Government, the Municipality and the public for their respective shares in the inauguration of the new era.

The Select Committee, mindful of the urgency of the measure, lost no time in submitting its report, and the second reading came on towards the end of March. The debate on the motion was short and uneventful, except for a fine vindication by Pherozeshah of the part which the Bombay Corporation had played in the building up of the city. As the acknowledged leader of that body, and as one who had had a considerable share in the moulding of the Municipal Act, he would never allow that there was anything wrong in the state of Denmark. In

his opinion, the Bill before the Council had raised the curtain on the fourth act of the drama of local self-government in Bombay. Having briefly passed in review the first three acts, he refuted in some detail the charges of incompetence and inefficiency often levelled against the Corporation by superior individuals. In his opinion, the arm-chair critic took no account of the difficulty and complexity of some of the problems which confronted the Municipality, and whenever anything went wrong, he was ready to pounce upon it and tear it to pieces. But such criticism was dictated either by ignorance or prejudice :—

“The truth is that, as your Lordship has gracefully testified in your letter to that body, the Corporation has done useful and valuable work in a variety of directions during the 25 years that have elapsed since the Act of 1872 inaugurated local self-government in this city. The present Bill has become necessary, not because there has been any failure in the work or the performance of its duties, but because a time has now come in the development of this city, as in the case of all other great cities, which, growing up unmethodically at haphazard, have suddenly found themselves outgrowing their capacities and requirements.”

It should not be forgotten, the speaker proceeded,

that the richest and the best of Western cities had their slums as well. In London, even so recently as 1890, hundreds of thousands of people lived in a condition which Professor Huxley had declared to be even inferior to that of West African savages, and it was generally admitted that 'the dens inhabited by the poorer section of the working classes dwelling in London were a disgrace to humanity and a dishonour to that enlightened and opulent city.' Much the same could be said of 'the gay capital,' until the genius of Hausmann transformed it in the brilliant days of the Third Empire. In Bombay, their needs and shortcomings had been brought home to them by the ravages of Plague, and Pherozeshah gave credit to Government for seizing the psychological moment and coming forward with the Bill. There were certain features, however, which required attention. For one thing, it was very essential that the constitution of the proposed Board should be such as to guard against recklessness, and limitations on its powers required to be imposed so as to provide against extravagant and ambitious expenditure. It was also necessary that the Board should be provided with larger funds, as for a long time it could not hope to meet the interest on the loan required for carrying out its work from the returns of its own operations. Bombay was a city in which many imperial interests were centred, and it was but right and just that



the necessary funds to meet the deficiency should be contributed from the imperial as well as the local exchequer, and that an unlimited burden should not be placed on the ratepayers of the City. While reserving to himself the right to criticize these and other details, Pherozechah gave the second reading a hearty support.

It was not to be, however, a case altogether of mutual congratulations and rejoicings. The non-official members were not going to abdicate their function of criticism, and there were notices of dozens of amendments on the agenda paper, dealing with various matters of detail. Most of these came from Pherozechah, who bore the brunt of the fighting, barring occasional onslaughts on the part of Mr. (now Sir) Goculdas Parekh, the sturdy champion of the peasantry known as the "Father of Gujarat," and of Mr. Vijbhucandas Atmaram, a fine type of the refined but orthodox Hindu. The Honourable member was, of course, fully equal to the task, and the greater part of the sittings was occupied in arguments between him on the one side, and Sir Charles Ollivant, the Advocate-General, and Mr. Walter Hughes, the first Chairman of the Trust, on the other. The chief fight was over what are known as the bludgeon clauses, which the serried ranks of the Government succeeded in retaining substantially as they were. The sturdy advocacy of the leader of the Opposition was able,

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A CONTESTED ELECTION—DEATH OF DR. BAHADURJI—A HOLIDAY INCIDENT. 1898-1899.

Now that Pherozeshah was thoroughly restored to health, his friends pressed him to go again to the Imperial Council, where he had done such brilliant work three years earlier, which ill-health had interrupted. At first, he declined to allow himself to be elected, feeling a disinclination for long and frequent absence from Bombay where there was a constant call on his time and energies. But being urged from many quarters to reconsider his decision, he yielded at length. In the meantime, Mr. Naoroji N. Wadia, one of the most prominent figures in the textile industry which has brought so much prosperity to Bombay, had entered the field, finding it clear of the most formidable combatant. There is reason to believe that he had sounded his opponent before putting forward his candidature. He knew very well that so long as the latter was willing to be elected, no one else stood any chance of getting into the Council.

His disappointment, natural enough under the circumstances, at the appearance at the last moment of Pherozeshah in the lists, was therefore considerable, and he decided upon a contest, which he otherwise would not have cared to engage in. He had already secured a number of votes, and the position was by no means hopeless.

The contest was very keen and carried on with some bitterness. The non-official members of the local Council, who formed the electorate, numbered a little over a dozen, and every vote counted. The efforts of Pherozeshah's friends succeeded at length in snatching a bare majority, which included his own vote. The result was received with considerable satisfaction by an expectant public, which, under other circumstances, would not have been sorry to see Mr. Wadia in the Imperial Council. *The Rast-Goftar*, which had long fallen foul of the Congress party, and burnt incense at the shrine of Mr. Bhownuggree, commented, however, in scathing terms on Pherozeshah's action in voting for himself, suggested doubts on that score about the validity of the election, and threw out a gentle hint that the Viceroy might refuse to accept the nomination. *The Pioneer* readily took up the cry, and recommended Pherozeshah forthwith to resign. It sought to make out that even his compatriots had been disgusted by his action. Apparently, it

would have preferred a dead-lock, for the six members who voted for and the six who voted against Pherozeshah were not likely to change their position, even if the election were to be held over and over again. *The Bombay Gazette* brought the issue down to the plane of commonsense : —

“ The mere fact of his standing in opposition to Mr. Wadia showed that Mr. Mehta desired to re-enter the Legislative Council, from which ill-health alone compelled him to retire two years ago, and neglect to exercise the franchise in his own favour would have been inconsistent with his candidature as well as with common-sense. In the British Parliament, members are not supposed to vote upon private bill legislation which directly affects their own pecuniary interests, though they often do so. But it is no violation of the unwritten law of party politics for a minister to vote against a motion for the reduction of his own salary or against proposals threatening the position of the Government of which he is a salaried member. Still less does it offend against good taste for a candidate for parliamentary or civic honours at home, or anywhere else to vote for his own election. This is the common practice in Municipal ward-elections in this city, and we should

like to see a candidate for one of the Corporation seats on the Standing Committee, who would admit that he voted for other competitors, and left the space on the ballot paper against his own name blank! . . . It is generally understood that when a man becomes a candidate for any public honour, he uses all legitimate means to secure it ; and if he does not make the best of his opportunities, he is written down by his neighbours in terms similar to those which Dogberry accepted as a just description of himself."

The incident was the first, but not the only one of its kind in the career of Pherozechah. Circumstances willed it that something like it should again take place in the closing years of his life, when he allowed himself once more to be persuaded into putting forward his candidature for a position of honour, and was only able to snatch victory by a single vote. A dispassionate view of the circumstances of the present contest leads one to the conclusion that Pherozechah would have done well if he had resisted the importunities of his friends, and stood aside in favour of a candidate who had come out on the assurance that he had not to fight the most powerful among his colleagues, whose supremacy none would ordinarily have dared to dispute.

## II.

The year witnessed the loss of a public-spirited citizen of brilliant gifts and great promise. Dr. K. N. Bahadurji passed away in the prime of life in August, 1898, a victim to the fell disease from which his skill, energy and devotion had rescued hundreds of his fellow-citizens. The event cast a gloom over the whole city, and came home to many, particularly members of his own community, as a personal loss. At a meeting of the Corporation held on the 16th August, Pherozeshah moved a resolution expressive of the sorrow with which the members had heard the news of the untimely death of a distinguished colleague. In language of deep emotion, he recalled the many services which Dr. Bahadurji had rendered to his profession, and to the City at large. He spoke of the great example the eminent Doctor had set at a time of panic by starting the Parsi Fever Hospital, to the working of which he had devoted himself night and day at the sacrifice of an extensive private practice. He referred to Dr. Bahadurji's untiring energy in the cause of suffering humanity, and his zealous, sometimes over-zealous, advocacy of everything which he believed was for the benefit and welfare of the City. A brilliant career, Pherozeshah observed in conclusion, had been suddenly and prematurely cut off, a colleague whom they sincerely loved, respected and admired had been cruelly snatched away in

the prime of life. Even his failings 'leaned to virtue's side,' and had endeared the man to them, and increased the respect felt for his fine character.

It was a handsome tribute and might be regarded as a sufficient answer to the idle gossip which charged the dictator with entertaining jealousy of a man who threatened to challenge his supremacy. It is true, Dr. Bahadurji had a will of his own combined with a virile intellect, and would have proved at best a troublesome and unruly follower, if he had joined the group which derived its inspiration from the chambers at Esplanade Road, from which the affairs of the City were directed. But brilliant and masterful as he was, it would be doing no service to his memory to suggest the possibility of his seriously threatening the position of one, whose rare gifts had enabled him to hold his own, and more than his own, against leaders of eminence in all parts of the land, and which had given him a dominating influence in the councils of the country. It may be admitted, Pherozeshah was not inclined to look with an indulgent eye on those who refused to toe the line on all occasions. But Dr. Bahadurji had loyally co-operated with his leader in various spheres of activity, and his efforts had been ungrudgingly acknowledged by the latter on more than one occasion, notably at the public meeting held two years before his death to welcome the Doctor on

his return after his triumphant fight on behalf of the independent medical profession. It was thus no conventional or insincere tribute which Pherozeshah paid to the memory of his young colleague, who, he recognized, had during his short career achieved a considerable measure of eminence, and whose passing away was a sad loss to the civic life of Bombay.

### III.

By way of relief from the details of Bills and Budgets which have so largely filled these pages, we may turn to an incident which illustrates a phase of Pherozeshah's personality which contributed greatly to the respect and awe in which he was universally held. In the hot weather of 1899, he happened to go to Matheran, that cool and sheltered hill, where Parsis of every description congregate in such large numbers in the summer months. Plague was then at its height and was exacting a terrible toll. There was a general feeling of panic, which was aggravated by the stringent regulations for detention, segregation, medical examination and the like, which were put into force by a Government faced with considerable difficulties in dealing with the situation. The Hill was then under the charge of Major Collie, who was somewhat of a martinet, and inclined to



be arbitrary in his methods, but who was for all that, an able and conscientious officer.

It was hardly surprising that the two men, each with a will of his own, should come into collision over such a ready source of friction as the plague regulations. Major Collie had issued an order that visitors to the Hill were to call daily at the Superintendent's office for examination, or in the alternative, might be examined by him every other day on payment of a fee of Rs. 50. These regulations were irksome in themselves, and as often happens, they were improved upon by zealous subordinates with the result that there was general dissatisfaction. Prominent visitors, among them Mr. Budrudin Tyabji, then a judge of the High Court, complained about the inconvenience and annoyance to which they were subjected, but Major Collie declined to relax the rigour of the precautions he deemed necessary for the safety of the Hill.

Such was the state of affairs when Pherozezshah appeared on the scene. As he was riding up to Matheran, a form which all visitors were required to fill in was handed to him at the spot known as the 'Dusturi'. He entered up the details, scratched out the declaration regarding the ten days' attendance at the Superintendent's office for purposes of examination, and returned the form. The challenge was thrown, the duel begun. Major

Collie insisted on Pherozeshah's attendance at his office, and on the regulations being observed in their entirety. Pherozeshah with equal emphasis declared that there was nothing in the plague rules posted up by the Superintendent, which made it incumbent on him to present himself for examination. He had no objection to anybody going to his place to make inquiries! He took his stand on the regulations, and not, as some people wrongly supposed, on a pass which enabled him and his family to travel throughout the Presidency without being subjected to detention or surveillance. A long correspondence ensued, and as may be readily imagined, it was not Major Collie who scored in this duel of words. The stern disciplinarian found that though he could impose his will upon high and low, rich and poor alike, he was no match for the formidable lawyer and politician. Pherozeshah carried the day, and Major Collie found himself powerless to enforce his orders.

The matter did not end there. Pherozeshah wrote a strong letter of remonstrance to the Plague Commissioner, who hastened to express "official regrets," and gave an assurance that instructions had been issued to prevent a recurrence of the trouble and annoyance to which the visitors to Matheran had been subjected. Pherozeshah also wrote to the Private Secretary to the Governor,

and sent the whole correspondence to the Press for publication. Thereupon, a great many people came out to give vent to their indignation, and the unfortunate Superintendent, who had had on opportunity of placing his own version before the public, got a very rough handling in the papers. This was too much for the *Times of India*, then under the editorship of Mr. Lovat Fraser, a brilliant writer, but a confirmed and bigoted opponent of Indian aspirations. In a scathing article the Paper dealt with the merits of the controversy, and charged Pherozezshah with having "allowed himself to be betrayed, in his letter to the Governor, with serious misstatements, more often into significant omissions of salient facts, and more than once into quotations which do not err on the side of ingenuousness." It condemned the loose talk about drawing a line of distinction between prominent citizens and those in a lower grade of society, and inquired where the demarcation was to be made. Were they to stop short at gentlemen who had climbed to the dizzy height of a seat in the Viceregal Council? The article went on to say that Mr. Mehta's lurid pictures of the miseries attendant upon the registration of names were largely the products of his own exuberant imagination, and observed in conclusion :—

“ The interests of the public demand that the task of excluding plague from our

health resorts should receive even more consideration than the dignity of members of Council. It is unfortunate that Mr. Mehta's own trivial grievances should have so large a place in his interest in plague matters. Still more lamentable is it that he should have found a prominent Government official ready to accept his ex-parte statements untested, and by plain implication to condemn a conscientious officer unheard. But we still find room for the hope that when the Bombay Government sets itself to deal with this question, it will take steps to remove the impression which has got abroad that it will not stand by its own orders regarding plague, and will abandon its officers to the first plausible person who heads an attack upon them."

This outburst provoked a sharp reply from Pherozeshah, containing insinuations concerning the origin and authorship of the article, which, he suggested, must have been inspired by Dr. Collie himself. Exception was taken by the editor to these passages as violating the well-established rule of English journalism that the personality of the writer of an editorial article should be kept out of controversy. As Pherozeshah would not consent to leaving out the offending portions, the *Times of India* declined to publish the letter, and hoped its

readers would not be inconsolable at the exclusion of a communication which extended to two columns, and ended by threatening a second. Pherozechah passed on the correspondence to *The Bombay Gazette*, whereupon there was a further exchange of recriminations and personalities.

The incident is noteworthy as showing the fibre of the man. He tolerated no nonsense. While other people protested and sank into silence, Pherozechah returned again and again to the attack, until he had exhausted all the weapons in his armoury. Some years before, when the authorities at Mahabaleshwar shut the door in the face of Indian visitors, and debarred them from the use of the tennis-courts and the library, largely endowed by the subscriptions of Indians, Pherozechah promptly challenged their right to do so, and made things so uncomfortable for them that they had to abandon the courts. His spirited attack on the caste-barriers set up by the white Brahmin in this country was the topic of the hour on the Hill. The echoes of the controversy were even heard in Bombay, and gave some people an opportunity of criticizing the troublesome visitor, and moralizing on the relations between the two races. When the Bombay Government on one occasion paid no attention to the representations of the Corporation, Pherozechah prevailed upon it to appeal to the Imperial Government, and when the latter upheld the decision of their

subordinate, the issue was carried to the Secretary of State for India and pressed home till it was brought to a satisfactory conclusion. When Lord Sandhurst as President of the Council disallowed a question concerning one of the Kathiawar states, Pherozeshah did not hesitate to challenge the ruling and approach the Government of India. When the Plague Committee appointed by Government played fast and loose with the money of the Corporation without rendering proper accounts, he threatened that no further advances would be made till all accounts of the sums allocated up to date were settled. When the committee appointed by the Bombay Government to report on a proposed increase in the city police force, following on the Hindu-Mohamedan riots of 1893, adopted an arbitrary procedure and put up a hasty report without allowing Pherozeshah, who was a member, an opportunity of fully stating his case, the committee generally, and its autocratic secretary, Mr. James Campbell, in particular, got a trouncing long remembered by all who witnessed the combat. In these and innumerable other ways, Pherozeshah showed the stern stuff of which he was made. If, as a leader of men, he has not been equalled by anyone, either before or after him, the reason must be sought, apart from his unusual gifts of intellect, in the fearlessness which distinguished him from early life, and which was never confounded

with mere bluster and aggressiveness. During his strenuous career, he provoked many jealousies, made many enemies. Harsh things were thought and said of him. But no opponent, however bitter, lightly ventured to cross swords with him, or fail to recognize that the formidable Bombay leader had a masterful personality, and that it was no mere gift of tongue or intellectual suppleness that raised him so immeasurably above his fellows.

## CHAPTER XX.

### PHEROZESHAH AND MR. GOKHALE—THE LAND REVENUE BILL.

1900-1901.

TOWARDS the end of 1900, Pherozeshah's health again compelled him to consider the question of his resignation from the Imperial Council. He was at Matheran in December, when he was attacked by fever. He wired for leave of absence from the Council, and received the reply that the Viceroy regretted to hear of his illness, but feared it would be impossible to exempt him, as desired, from attendance until the second or third week in January, seeing that important committee work would commence before then. He was asked, therefore, to endeavour to be in Calcutta for the meeting fixed for the 4th January.

Pherozeshah at once came down, but his doctors would not let him undertake the journey to Calcutta immediately, and he had to put off his departure till the 9th January, when he left Bombay. After a fortnight in Calcutta, he returned, hoping to go back in time for the active work of the session. Some days afterwards, the Secretary in the Legislative Department wrote to him, point-



ing out that it was an invariable practice to ask for leave in advance, and that it was desirable that every member of the Council must be in a position to give regular attendance during his period of office. In reply, Pherozeshah explained the circumstances of his absence on the occasions referred to, agreed that it was the duty of a member to attend regularly, and stated that he considered it a privilege to serve under a President like Lord Curzon. But his health had become so uncertain, that he felt it incumbent on him to make room for someone who could prove more energetic. He tendered his resignation, therefore, with an acknowledgment of the many acts of courtesy he had received at the hands of the Viceroy. In accepting the resignation, Pherozeshah was informed that Lord Curzon greatly regretted to hear of the circumstances which rendered it impossible for the honourable member adequately to perform the duties of attendance in the Imperial Council, where it had always been a pleasure to see him at the table.

An Amurath an Amurath succeeds. If there was one man in all India capable of wearing the mantle, it was Mr. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and he sought the aid of Pherozeshah for stepping into the vacancy. In a letter which he wrote to his leader on the 15th January, 1901—a human document of considerable interest—he laid bare

the hopes and aspirations which filled his noble heart. He spoke of his impending retirement from the Fergusson College, to which he had dedicated the best years of his youth, and of his intention to devote the rest of his life to political work in India and in England. He felt that unless young men came forward to devote all their time and energies to public work in the spirit in which Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji had been working for fifty years, not only was much real progress impossible, but even the ground which had already been gained was in danger of being lost. His wife's death had destroyed the principal tie which bound him to family life and a settled home, and he could now carry, without much effort, into the field of politics the devotion with which he had been working for his college. He had built up for himself a small income of about Rs. 125 a month, which, with his monthly pension of Rs. 20 from the College, was enough to keep him in comfort. What he wanted now was a chance of making himself useful to his country. Of course everyone would be sincerely pleased, he added, if Pherozeshah continued to represent Bombay in the Supreme Council as long as health and energy were vouchsafed to him. His great talents and his unique record placed him absolutely beyond the reach of competition. But, it was rumoured, he was shortly going to retire from the Council.

On personal grounds, Mr. Gokhale said he would have wished the resignation to come later :—

“I was hoping that you would, even if you did not stand for a fresh election, at any rate complete your present term, which does not expire till the middle of 1902; that during the time I might show some useful work in the Local Council, so that when you retired you might consider me as not quite the least deserving among those who are working for public good in this Presidency at a good, respectful distance behind you. Everyone feels—I state what I honestly think—that on the score of gifts, natural and acquired, on the score of prestige, on the score of those numerous qualities which are indispensable in a political leader, there is no equalling you, or even coming near you.”

The same could not be said, of course, of the men who aspired to succeed him, and there being little difference between the qualifications of the various candidates, Mr. Gokhale asked for sympathy and encouragement. He was conscious that he was too young for the position, but the fierce mental anguish which he had had to endure since 1897 (when he had been led to make some allegations in England with regard to the manner in which Plague

regulations had been enforced in Poona, and had publicly to withdraw the charges and admit their baselessness), had made him older in judgment and experience. In any case, it was not wholly a disadvantage that he would begin the new career at a comparatively early age. He begged to assure Pherozeshah it was no mere personal ambition which was urging him to seek the honour. His reasons were different :—

“ In 1897, when a perfect storm of fierce criticism broke over my head in connection with my unhappy share in the incidents of that year, nothing wounded me deeper than ——’s denunciation of me in the House of Commons as a ‘ despicable perjurer.’ The words burnt into my heart, and the night I read them, I made up my mind to devote my life, as soon as I was free from my pledge, to the furtherance of our political cause in England, to which I had, without meaning it, done such serious injury. And for this work, a brief period of membership of the Viceregal Council will be very useful. The painful affair of 1897 will perhaps be brought up against me again and again, but the testimony of Lord Sandhurst himself, and my membership of the Bombay and Supreme Councils, subsequent to that incident, will go a long

way towards silencing my critics. The English work is dear to my heart also for the reason that it will please Sir W. Wedderburn, Mr. Hume and Mr. Dadabhai, on whom I was instrumental in bringing humiliation four years ago."

Mr. Gokhale concluded by saying that he had written frankly and without reserve, and he hoped he would not be misunderstood. He already owed much to Pherozeshah in public life, and he felt he might lay bare to the latter the aspirations as well as the wounds of his heart without being repulsed for doing so.

With the support of Pherozeshah and a few other friends, including Mr. (now Sir) T. J. Bennett of *The Times of India*, Mr. Gokhale was elected to the vacancy in April. At one time, Mr. Bomanji Petit and Mr. Ibrahim Rahimtulla thought of contesting the seat, but they were persuaded to withdraw, and the election was made unanimously. A happier choice could not have been made. If it was Pherozeshah who introduced a new spirit into the Council Chamber, and taught his countrymen to stand up and speak up like men, it was Mr. Gokhale who gave them their first lessons in constructive statesmanship, and paved the way for the enlargement of their rights and liberties. Each was a pioneer in his own way, and together they forged the weapon which in the fulness of

time won for India the recognition of her right to self-government and equal partnership within the empire.

## II.

If Pherozeshah expected that the resignation of his seat in the Imperial Council meant a period of comparative ease for him, he was soon to be disillusioned. In the middle of the year, a storm of unprecedented violence broke over the Presidency, and threw it into a state of considerable excitement. From the secluded heights of Mahableshwar, an 'innocent little Bill' was quietly launched into existence, calculated to effect far-reaching changes in the land revenue system of the Presidency. As its real character came to be recognized, an agitation was started such as has not often been seen in this Presidency.

Under the Bombay Land Revenue Code of 1879, land when brought under survey settlement, was to be held and occupied "in perpetuity, conditionally on the payment of the amounts due on account of the land revenue for the same," and the right of occupancy was declared to be a heritable and transferable property, subject to certain provisions, and could immediately pass to the person whose agreement to become occupant was accepted by the Collector. Under the guise of protecting the

ryot from the clutches of the money-lender, the Bombay Land Revenue Code Amendment Bill sought to do away with this right of alienation and arm the executive with powers to grant land forfeited to the Crown on such terms *and for such periods* as the Collector might prescribe. The authors of the Bill vehemently protested that their only object was to protect the poor ignorant ryot against the rapacity of the *saukar*, and they denounced their opponents as ignorant ill-informed critics, who had allowed themselves to be made the tools of the money-lending classes. With equal vehemence, the leaders of the agitation declared that the real object of the measure was to drive in the thin end of the wedge, and to establish state landlordism by degrees. Otherwise, where was the necessity of reducing the ryots to the status of short-term tenants, assuming even that it was desirable to restrict their rights of transfer ?

The battle raged long and furiously. Among other demonstrations of popular feeling, a monster meeting was held in the Town Hall on the 27th July, which was attended by 700 delegates from the mofussil. It was presided over by Pherozeshah, who, as may be readily imagined, was among the strongest opponents of the Bill, the real drift of which he had divined at once. He was accorded an enthusiastic reception by the vast audience. In his speech from the chair, he gave a vigorous

exposition of the policy underlying the measure, handling his facts and arguments with his usual skill. A damaging case was made out by him and the various speakers who followed. Resolutions were passed, expressive of the general feeling in regard to the Bill, and the necessity of giving the public sufficient time for opinion and criticism. The indignant sponsors of the Bill replied by denouncing the organizers of the meeting, ridiculing the audience, and condemning the "inflammatory oratory" indulged in on the occasion.

It was thus in an atmosphere surcharged with feeling that the Council met at Poona to go through the solemn farce of reading the Bill a second time. The official spokesmen seemed to be in a temper, and the tone and tenor of their speeches were not calculated to contribute towards a dispassionate discussion of the questions at issue. The honourable member in charge of the Bill started by graciously remarking that Government would have welcomed real criticism, but no reasonable man or body of men could be influenced by speech and writing, which, however vigorous in language, were entirely beside the point. Government expected those who took the part of leaders of public opinion to adhere to the first principles of reasoning ! After this pleasant reference to himself and his political associates, what could Pherozeshah do, when he rose to move an amendment, but "seek help and



consolation in the reflection that human nature is so constituted, that in a controversy, you are always convinced that your opponents are always wanting in the very elements of reasoning if you do not fall in with their views ?”

The amendment sought to put off the evil day by referring the Bill for opinion to various officials, associations and individuals. It was moved in a speech which dealt with merciless logic with all the arguments advanced in favour of the measure. The mover did not mince his words. In his opinion, the sinister object of the Bill was to go back upon the solemn adjustment of rights sanctioned by legislation years ago.

“From amongst a certain confusion in the use of the words ‘waste, unoccupied and forfeited lands,’ the intention of the Bill shoots out clear. It is to be a declaratory Act, establishing the absolute right of the State as sole landlord of all soil in the Presidency. Government seem to be taking a lesson from the experiences of the war in South Africa. Frontal attacks are superseded in favour of flank movements, and this Bill may be described as a flank movement by which the declaration of the sole ownership may be quietly and effectively established and declared.”

The amendment was supported by Mr. Gokhale

in a powerful and closely-reasoned speech. It was vehemently opposed, among others, by the Honourable Mr. Muir Mackenzie, who said :—

“ How many of the gentlemen who have criticized the proposed measure of the Government have spent any long portion of their life in contact with the Indian ryot in his village ? Can the honourable mover of the amendment, can the eloquent Professor Gokhale, or, despite his recent experiences, the Honourable Mr. Pherozeshah, compare even faintly in their knowledge of village life, in their intimacy with the ryot, the son of the soil, with my friends the Honourable Mr. Logan and the Honourable Mr. Cumine, with the Collectors and their Assistants, most of whom not only support, but have long begged for a measure of the kind ? Have my honourable friends ridden from village to village, chatted with the people in the *chavri*, in the field, by the roadside ? What do they, after all, know of the poorer Deccan Kunbi, or the Gujarati Koli, except perhaps, as a defendant in a money suit, or a witness in the Courts ? With all my admiration for their talents, I respectfully doubt whether, despite identity of race, the familiarity of language from birth, they know as much of the true people as the

District Officer, keen on that first essential of his business, the discovery of the wants of the people.”

After nearly a dozen other speakers had addressed the Council, Pherozechah replied to the debate in a speech which occupied fully an hour. He knew he was fighting a lost battle, but, as he had observed only a day previous during the discussion on the Budget, it was not the first time he was ploughing the sands. With considerable emphasis, he once again vindicated his claims to speak on behalf of the ryots as against the omniscient district officer. He claimed to know village life far better and far more truly than English officials, including among them the honourable members, who had ventured to repeat a pretension which had often been exploded, and which he had exposed more than once on public platforms :—

“The English official moves among the natives, isolated even when not unsympathetic, ignorant even when not uninquisitive, a stranger and a foreigner to the end of the chapter. My Lord, I can therefore truly say that it is I and my native colleagues who can claim to speak at first hand, and of our own personal and intuitive knowledge and experience of the feelings and thoughts of the ryot, his prejudices, his habits of thought, his ways of life, his ambi-

tions and his aspirations. In speaking on this Bill, it is we who represent the real views of the agricultural masses, not the insular and isolated English official.’

Speaking with all the weight of his knowledge and experience, Pherozeshah went on to condemn the empirical legislation, which sought to do away by a stroke of the pen with a system established by the statesmanship of an earlier generation of revenue officials of great experience and sympathetic insight. It was not for their successors to set themselves up as their critics. The officials of the day were no longer the giants of old ; they were narrow in their views, dogmatic in their opinions, and intolerant of differences of opinion.

It was a powerful indictment, and traversed a very wide ground. One by one, the speaker demolished the positions taken up by the supporters of the Bill. He held up their pretensions to ridicule, poured scorn on their efforts to belittle the opposition, and subjected to a masterly analysis the claims they advanced on behalf of the measure. It was a speech which, in the House of Commons, or any other Parliament of free men, might have turned the scale, might have converted a hopeless minority into a substantial majority. But the well-drilled ranks of the Government listen not to reason or argument. As an honourable member observed at a recent meeting of the Imperial Council, ‘ theirs

not to reason why, theirs but to vote and die!’ The amendment was defeated by fourteen votes to nine. Thereupon, as previously arranged, Pheroze-shah left the Hall, followed by Sir Bhalchandra Krishna, and Messrs. Goculdas Parekh, Daji Abaji Khare and G. K. Gokhale. The Bill immediately went through the second and the third reading, and was straightway passed into law.

A perfect storm of indignation broke in certain quarters over the heads of Pheroze-shah and his loyal colleagues, who, at his bidding, had walked out of the Hall, and declined to take any part in the solemn farce of going through the Bill stage by stage. Never had such an affront been offered, such a challenge been thrown, and Anglo-India and officialdom were furious. Their venom was mostly directed against Pheroze-shah. It was he who had dictated this novel method of protest. Mr. Gokhale, indeed, had felt some doubts about the wisdom of the course proposed to be adopted, and had written at length to Pheroze-shah, suggesting the desirability of his moving some amendments which might tie the Government down to their declarations in the Council. At the same time, he had assured his leader of his loyal support in whatever course the latter thought proper to adopt, and declared that he would rather be in the wrong with him than be in the right by himself. Pheroze-shah had not been exactly pleased with this

attitude, and had wired to Mr. Gokhale that he was free to act as he liked; whereupon, the latter had given in at once, saying he did not wish his conduct to be regarded in the light of a revolt against Pherozeshah's authority, which he deemed it not merely a duty but a privilege loyally to support.

*The Times of India* in a scathing article held up Pherozeshah and his colleagues to ridicule, in the inimitable vein characteristic of Mr. Lovat Fraser :—

“ It is difficult to contemplate seriously the spectacle of Mr. Mehta striding towards the door, in order to emphasize the novel theory that the duty of the true patriot is to run away; while the gentlemen who rather sheepishly stole after him only excite feelings of compassionate amusement. Mr. Mehta does not often make tactical mistakes, but he blundered rather badly in his pre-arranged exit from the Council Hall. Meant to be dramatic, his performance was merely comic. Mr. Mehta had evidently forgotten the wholesome lesson of Burke and the dagger, or he would never have permitted himself to move the Presidency to smiles, when he wished to be particularly impressive. He forgot, too, that little scenes of this description should at least convey the idea

of spontaneity; whereas a good many people knew beforehand what was going to happen. It is a risky experiment for public men to take to histrionics towards the end of their career. They may like Michael Finsbury in "The Wrong Box" rehearse the necessary walk with telling effect; but they are tolerably certain to come to grief in the stage management. . . . A toga would have been useful; it can be flung over the shoulders at the last reproachful pause on the threshold. But Mr. Mehta had not a toga at hand; his exit was anything but dignified; and somehow the shallow artifice fell flat. The Revenue Bill remains where it did,—and everybody is laughing. That is generally the fate of these performances, as Mr. Mehta's ingenuous followers will do well to remember next time they meditate amateur theatricals."

At the end, *The Times of India* suggested that it was a matter for discussion whether those members who had shaken the dust of the Council Chamber off their feet ought not to resign their seats. The non-official members were nominated to perform certain public duties, and if they proposed to follow the practice, when in a minority, of declining to participate in the meetings of the Council, their assistance was not essential to the

conduct of business, and their connection with the Council became superfluous. The obvious consequence would be that it would become necessary to nominate other members who had a clearer grasp of their duties to the state and the public, and if such a necessity arose, it was desirable that it should be unflinchingly adopted.

It was not to be expected that Pherozeshah would take these strictures lying down, and in three successive letters to *The Times of India* he expounded at length the case for the Opposition, without, of course, convincing his adversary. Time has shown which of the contending factions had the right on its side. From the attitude subsequently adopted by Government towards the question, one may legitimately draw the inference that they came to realize in some measure that the opposition to the Bill was based, not on ignorance or self-interest, but on a true appreciation of the wants, habits and conditions of life of the ignorant and down-trodden ryot.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE KITCHENER INCIDENT—PHEROZESHAH AND THE CONGRESS. 1902-1904.

THE dull days which followed were in the nature of a reaction from the passion and bitterness evoked by the controversy over the Land Revenue Bill. In September, 1902, however, local politics were enlivened by a little storm in a tea-cup, which arose through a movement to honour the late Lord Kitchener. "The hero of Omdurman" was coming out to India as Commander-in-Chief, fresh from his triumphs on the blood-stained veldts of South Africa. The veteran editor of the *Rast-Goftar*, Mr. Kabraji, felt that the first Municipality in India ought not to let the occasion pass by without honouring the most distinguished soldier in the Empire. He brought up, accordingly, a proposal in the Corporation for presenting an address of welcome to Lord Kitchener on his arrival in Bombay.

A stickler for principles and precedents, Pherozeshah opposed the motion, though he keenly appreciated Lord Kitchener's great qualities as a soldier. He pointed out that the custom of the

Corporation was to honour only the representatives of the King, the members of the royal family, and such individuals as had rendered distinguished services to the City. He instanced the case of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand—whose tragic death at Sarajevo in the fateful July of 1914 was to plunge a whole world into war—whom it was sought to honour in a similar fashion on his visit to India. On that occasion, the Corporation had looked up precedents, and carefully considered the matter, with the result that the proposal had to be dropped. Pherozeshah went on to point out that the Corporation had never been known to present addresses of welcome to Commanders-in-Chief of India. Had there been such a precedent, it would certainly have voted them, on their departure from the country, to Lord Napier of Magdalla, one of the noblest and most gallant officers of the British army, and to Lord Roberts, another general of distinction, who were both universally liked and respected. These arguments weighed with the Corporation, and the voting resulted in Mr. Kabraji's motion being defeated by a large majority. The comments of the *Indian Daily News* of Calcutta will best indicate the feeling that was roused in certain quarters by the incident :—

“ Our London correspondent states that the utmost surprise is felt in London at the refusal of the Bombay Corporation to pre-

sent Lord Kitchener with an address of welcome; but if they knew in London as much as we do in India about the 'finest municipality in the East,' they would hardly have been taken aback. Since Lord Reay's Bombay Municipal Act, at the birth of which Mr. Pherozeshah Mehta presided as chief nurse, the Bombay Corporation has become a sort of diluted Tammany with Mr. Mehta as supreme Boss. It must be said to the latter's credit, as a rule, he uses his autocratic power in the best interests of the city; but like most autocrats, he is impatient of criticism and intolerant of independence, especially among his own race. That is why Mr. Kabraji's motion was thrown out. Had it been proposed by 'Eha,' or Mr. James MacDonald, in a speech in which the Parsee Dictator was soothed with a little gentle flattery, we believe the proposal would have been adopted, and Bombay saved from the ridiculous position in which she finds herself to-day."

The article ended with a wail that it was hard that the whole of civic India should suffer in the estimation of the new Commander-in-Chief, because, forsooth, two Parsee citizens well past middle age were unable to forget the quarrels of their youth. If the writer had recalled Mr. Wacha's outburst

during the discussion on the proposition about 'the Madhi's tomb,' he would have realized that it was not altogether a question of precedents or personalities that weighed with the majority. The Corporation and the public whom it represented, could scarcely be expected to enthuse over victories, which whatever their value to other parts of the Empire, meant nothing at all to a country, which was made to realize in a hundred different ways that, in spite of all the fatuous flapdoodle about "the brightest jewel in the British Crown," it had really no recognized place in the Imperial Federation.

## II.

The Congress was to hold its annual session at Madras during the Christmas of 1903, and from many quarters Pherozeshah received urgent requests to attend it. He had not yet favoured the Southern Presidency with his presence and guidance, though repeatedly urged to do so. Five years before, when the Congress was to be held in the same place, Mr. Pillai of the *Madras Standard* had represented to him that there was a consensus of opinion that the success of the session largely depended on his presence, and begging him to attend. He had also received a strong representation from Mr. (now Sir) Sankaran Nair, one of the ablest and

to go for various reasons. When the opportunity came again in 1903, he was pressed once more from many quarters not to disappoint the people of Madras. Among those who appealed to him was Mr. Viraraghavachari, one of the most prominent Congressmen in the province, who strongly urged on Pherozeshah the importance of his presence. The Madras leader pointed out that the movement was slowly drifting without proper guidance. Things were not moving in the right direction ever since the absence of the Father of the Congress, "whose word was law, and whose expostulations, scolding and even bullying were accepted as a privilege by the recipients." There was a widespread desire to have a change in the working of the Congress, and in the list of subjects that were annually discussed. It was felt that the movement had degenerated into an annual occasion for a large number of speeches on a portentous array of propositions, only a very few of which were heard of again till the next session of the Congress. There was also a feeling, he continued, that some sort of constitution should be given to the movement. The young men were getting restive and chafing at the bit. All sorts of wild proposals were being made, and the air was thick with the signs of the storm that was gathering. The Congress was loudly crying for its old and trusted leaders.

Pherozeshah obeyed the call and went. Mr. Lal

Mohun Ghosh, who, after a brilliant public career, had lived for some years in retirement, had been brought out from his political seclusion and elected President. His speech from the chair was in print a few days before the session was to be held, but somehow Pherozeshah did not receive a copy for some time. He had been told that the President-elect had in his address mildly chastised some of the older leaders, notably Pherozeshah himself, for their autocratic exercise of authority over the Congress. He had warned the young men who aspired to be leaders, against factions and cliques, and had urged them to be especially careful that their own acts might not be condemned as autocratic by the rank and file of the party. They should take care, he had said, that it might not be said of any of them what Gibbon had said of one of the Roman Tribunes, that "he spoke the language of patriots and trod in the footsteps of despots."

When the speech was at length placed in the hands of Pherozeshah, he decided upon taking the wind out of the sail of the President-elect, and took charge of the proposition for electing him to the chair. After paying a tribute to the great abilities of Mr. Ghosh, Pherozeshah went on to suggest that he had become a political *Yogi* after his electioneering campaigns in England, and had possibly formed ideas which were remote from the realities of the situation :—

“For example, Brother Delegates, he may imagine that I, a mild Parsee, belonging to a mild race, may be charged with being a despot. Why, gentlemen, he might apply to me the words from one of the great historians, that I talked the language of patriots but trod in the footsteps of despots. Can there be a greater calumny on a mild Parsee than that? Then, gentlemen, he might again imagine, not coming in actual contact with us, but reading only newspapers, that there are terrible factions and cliques in the Congress. I will venture to tell him, now that he has come out of his political *Yogism*, that we have our little differences—we always had them and shall have them I hope, but factions and cliques founded on personal objects and selfish aims have been totally unknown to us.”

The humour of the situation created by this unexpected move was much appreciated by the audience, which had copies of Mr. Ghosh's speech already in its hands. But the unfortunate President was greatly taken aback, and not unnaturally, did not like his being outwitted in such a fashion. He took it in good spirit, however, and when at the commencement of his address, he referred to Pherozeshah's observations, he merely remarked that if he was suffering from any delusions, he had the

consolation of knowing that his delusions were shared by some of the leading Indian newspapers in Calcutta and Madras.

The incident was widely commented on. The low murmurs which were so often heard against the almost despotic sway exercised by Pherozeshah over the Congress, had at length found definite expression in a presidential address. How far the pointed rebuke administered by Mr. Lal Mohun Ghosh was calculated to affect the position of the dictator, it is difficult to tell. The situation was so adroitly handled by Pherozeshah, and the tables were turned so neatly, that the anger of his opponents was dissolved in laughter. Critics, whether hostile or friendly, seemed to enjoy the clever move, and to realize more clearly than ever that as a debater and tactician there was none to approach the Bombay leader. *The Madras Standard* in the course of a leading article headed "Mr. Mehta and the Congress," reflected the general opinion of the country on this much-discussed incident :—

"Mr. Mehta thinks that the word despot has been applied to him. We do not know who did so ; but in our opinion, he is anything but a despot. He is a leader of men, but not of the despotic sort. In his own sphere, he is the Rupert of debate, but with none of Rupert's defects in the field of action.



He is great, but not as the man to whom the term Rupert of debate was first applied by Lytton, the novelist and statesman. He beats down his opponents by the weight of his facts, by the overwhelming force of his arguments. A man who is nurtured, and lives in the atmosphere of debate, where all are alike and free to use their own weapons, cannot certainly be a despot. Even if Mr. Mehta be a despot, we would rather have the Congress led by him than by the most popular of our democrats. If the Congress is to be under the despotism of one man, it will be to its advantage to be under the despotism of such a man as Mr. Mehta, perhaps the ablest and the most picturesque of Congress leaders. He can fire the imagination and stir the hearts of Congressmen more effectively than anybody else who is a Congressman. By the prudent vigour of his counsels, by his tact, by his judgment, and by his deep knowledge both of the condition of the people and the working of the machinery of the Government, he could lead the Congress with success, and give satisfaction to the public at large. It is better to be led by such a despot than by a whole generation of democratic leaders."

This dominance was all the more astonishing in that it was often exercised from a distance. Though identified with the Congress from its very inception, and though he had rapidly attained to a position of almost absolute authority, Pherozeshah was never able to maintain a close and personal touch with the movement. In spite of the entreaties of his friends and followers, who year after year urged him to attend and lead the Congress, he kept away from more than one session. He was never such a familiar figure to Congressmen all over the country as were, for instance, Mr. Surendranath Bannerji, Pundit Madan Mohun Malaviya or Mr. Dinshaw Wacha. For all that, he exercised a dominating influence over the national movement. Leaders in other provinces took their cue from him on most questions of importance, and the influential Bombay section was always amenable to his control, and loyally supported the views and the general lines of his policy.

If Pherozeshah's authority were respected even from a distance, it is easy to understand that whenever the Congress was held in Bombay, his influence was absolutely supreme. He invariably became Chairman of the Reception Committee, and overshadowed everybody, including the President. It was this personal ascendancy which materially contributed to the success of the Bombay session of 1904, and stemmed the tide of extremism which

arose at Benares in the following year, gathered strength at Calcutta, and finally submerged the Congress at Surat. His masterful direction of affairs ensured its smooth working, and his association with the Reception Committee as its spokesman, lent weight and dignity to the session. His speech of welcome to the Delegates struck a note of robust optimism calculated to drive away all counsels of despair. Starting with a vindication of the necessity of holding the annual session, he laid before the audience 'the confession of faith of a devout and irreclaimable Congressman':—

“I am an inveterate, I am a robust optimist like Mahadeo Govind Ranade. I believe in divine guidance through human agency. It may be the fatalism of the East, but it is an active not a passive fatalism, a fatalism which recognizes that the human wheels of the machinery must actively work to fulfil their appointed task. My humility saves me from the despair that seizes more impatient souls like those who have recently preached a gospel of despondency—I always seek hope and consolation in the words of the poet :—

‘I have not made the world, and He that has made it will guide.’

My steadfast loyalty is founded upon this rock of hope and patience ; seeking

the will of Providence, like Oliver Cromwell, in dispensations rather than revelations, seeing God's will like him in fulfilment of events, I accept British rule as Ranade did, as a dispensation so wonderful, a little island set at one end of the world establishing itself in a far continent as different as could be, that it would be folly not to accept it as a declaration of God's will."

It was, he continued, the business of the politically-minded classes to see that those whom Providence had sent to rule over them should unwaveringly pursue the policy of righteousness, which the statesmen who had consolidated British rule in India had declared to be the guiding policy of the Crown. He scouted the notion that the salvation of India was not to be sought in the field of politics in the existing stage of her development. The educated classes would have been sadly failing in their duty if they had not devoted their new culture and energy to the task, not of supplanting their rulers, but of guiding them and supplementing their endeavours. He deplored all the more, therefore, the attitude of Englishmen towards the Congress. It was a grave political blunder to treat the movement with resentment or contempt. A section of the Congress had condemned it for its disappointing inutility, and their

denunciations had been received with exultation in certain quarters. With prophetic inspiration, Pherozeshah warned the enemies of the Congress against this foolish attitude. He asked them to realize clearly that the men whom they cheered did not possibly desire to abandon altogether the field of politics, but might in time be carried away vainly to imagine that the failure of constitutional methods like those of the Congress were an argument to substitute others not so strictly temperate.

Pherozeshah next dealt at some length with the achievements of the Congress. It was an honourable record which left no room for disappointment or despair. Apart, however, from any material achievements, the greatest triumph of the Congress lay in the awakening of the soul of the nation, and the forces it had let loose, which were clamouring for expression in so many fields of human activity. The address concluded with an expression of hope that Lord Curzon, while he asked Indians to believe in the good faith, high honour and upright intentions of his countrymen, might come to realize that the Congress, too, was inspired by duty, patriotism and loyalty.

In its vindication of the aims, methods and achievements of the national organization, and in its exposition of his own political faith, it was a notable pronouncement, and was listened to with rapt attention by the vast and picturesque gathering

which had assembled in the spacious *pandal*, erected on the site on which the Prince of Wales Museum now stands. The presence of Pherozeshah on a public platform always evoked unbounded enthusiasm among Bombay audiences, and there was nothing unusual in the fact that his speech was punctuated with applause, and its close was greeted with tumultuous cheering. Appreciation of it was not confined, however, to the immediate circle of those who were accustomed to hang on his words. *The Times of India*, no friend of the Congress in those days, while describing that staunch and devoted servant of India, Sir Henry Cotton, who presided over the deliberations of the Congress, as ‘a somewhat indifferent performer upon a penny trumpet,’ whose oration had not risen above the level usually attained by any respectable vestryman, characterized Pherozeshah’s speech as one of the best he had delivered in point of language and of sentiments :-

“It is no flattery to say that Sir Pherozeshah Mehta’s address, though bearing signs of hasty preparation—one portentous sentence of three hundred and fifty words must have left the worthy knight breathless—was incomparably the better effort of the two. It was witty and pungent, and contained one or two clever home-thrusts; the delightful quotation of Sir John Bowley’s

point of view was one of the greatest things heard on the Congress platform for many a long day. We can forgive much to Sir Pherozeshah Mehta in that he is never dull, though it is really time he read more poetry and allowed certain overworked verses a little rest; and when we discover him modestly comparing himself to Oliver Cromwell, we find ourselves murmuring that perhaps a more suitable standard of comparison is found in Boanerges."

The official report of the Bombay Congress of 1904 issued by the committee speaks in very grateful and eloquent terms of Pherozeshah's share in the success of the session. We are told that when other provinces were hesitating about inviting the Congress, Pherozeshah "boldly stepped forward, and with a sublime confidence in his city and his presidency," offered to arrange its being held in Bombay. His towering personality, great powers of organization, undisputed position as a leader and wonderful tact made everyone proud to work under such a chief, and made the gathering the notable success it proved to be. After such encomiums, it is hardly surprising that a friendly critic felt constrained to observe that, though there was a good deal of truth in all this, he imagined Pherozeshah would have preferred to remain a little nearer the level of average mortals !

It was at this Congress of 1904, that a mild revolt against Pherozeshah's authority broke out. During a heated discussion in the Subjects Committee, one of the Punjab delegates—Lala Murlidhar, according to most accounts—complained bitterly about Pherozeshah bearing down all opposition, and carrying everything his own way. Pherozeshah got up, and answered at length the charge flung against him, and ended by innocently asking the delegates why they did not press their views upon the committee, and carry it with them. Said the Lala, "but your personality carries everything before it." "I can't help my personality, gentlemen, can I?" quickly retorted Pherozeshah, and this prompt and happy rejoinder at once silenced his angry critics, and averted what might have proved an acrimonious discussion. While the rebellious section remained sullen, the impression left on the minds of the majority of delegates was one of whole-hearted appreciation of the great gifts which had given Pherozeshah the position of unchallenged supremacy which was so bitterly resented in certain quarters. Mr. Natesan, the enterprising publisher of Madras, and a staunch Congressman, gave expression to the general sentiment in a letter he wrote to Pherozeshah on his return home :—

"I can never forget the two happy evenings I passed at your house. I and my friends left Bombay with the regret that we



were not privileged to stay there longer, and be benefited by your inspiring personality—despite Lala Murlidhar's complaint about it. It is only after we saw you and watched you with reverence and affection that we realized the force of personality and leadership. In a leading article on 'Japan—its message to India,' which I have written for the *Indian Review*, I have referred to you as 'the born and chosen leader of the Indian people.' This is what we all felt to be."

One other matter before we dismiss the Congress of 1904. The Congress had passed a resolution for sending delegates to England to rouse public opinion in view of the forthcoming elections. Sir William Wedderburn, who had come out to attend the Congress, was anxious that the deputation should make a success, and before leaving Bombay, he wrote to Pherozeshah earnestly pleading with him the necessity of his taking the lead in the matter. All India desired him to do it; no one else possessed all his advantages. Even a fortnight's stay in England to start the campaign and give a straight lead would meet the absolute necessities of the case. Sir William would not have asked for such a sacrifice, but it was a case of public duty at a critical and favourable moment.

Pherozeshah did not go. His habits of life and

his many pre-occupations made it impossible. It was ultimately decided that Mr. Gokhale and Mr. Jinnah should go as the representatives of Bombay on the Indian deputation. At the meeting held on May 3rd, 1905, for the purpose of appointing them, Pherozeshah presided and took the opportunity of reiterating the opinions, first expressed by him at a similar meeting held in Bombay twenty years before. In his view, the country could never hope for anything until Indian questions were thoroughly sifted and examined from every point of view before the British public and the British Parliament, and such a sifting and examination could never be attained, unless they were submitted to the clash of party warfare. Sir William was at one with him in this opinion, and the success of Mr. Gokhale's mission, when the great Liberal wave of 1906 swept the country, showed how their faith in the principles of that party was justified.

## CHAPTER XXII.

UNIVERSITY REFORM AND INDIAN LEADERS :

A NOTABLE CONTEST.

1902-1903.

THE most notable event of Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty was the controversy which raged over the question of University reform on which he had set his heart from a very early date of his assumption of office. The memorable Despatch of 1854 had given India an educational system that had unchained forces which had slumbered for ages. With occasional aberrations, the policy laid down there had been steadily pursued, and had created the new India of which one saw so many signs on every hand. With the growth of unrest resulting from the upheaval in men's minds, brought about by the influx of new ideas, a feeling had grown, however, that the system of education in India was at the root of the disease in the body politic. Some believed it was ungodly; others, that it was too exclusively literary, and it became the fashion to think that 'a literature which contained invaluable lessons for life and character, and a science which was founded upon the rever-

ent contemplation of Nature and her truths,' had left no permanent impress upon the moral and intellectual fibre of the thousands of young men who had been fed and nurtured on them.

In the closing years of the century, attempts began to be made to control a system believed by its critics to be responsible for a vast amount of mischief. Lord Curzon, indeed, had declared in 1900, in a speech delivered by him as Chancellor of the Calcutta University, that he had no intention whatever of departing from what had always been the mainspring of the educational policy of the Government of India, namely, the substitution, where possible, of Government aid for Government management, and the encouragement of private initiative and effort. But he had made it clear that Government were not going to pay for education out of the public funds, and to divest themselves of all responsibility for their proper allocation :—

“My desire, therefore, is to revindicate on behalf of the State and its various provincial agents that responsibility which there has been a tendency to abdicate, and to show to the world that our educational system in India, liberal and elastic as I would have it remain, is yet not free to assume any promiscuous shape that accident or intention may force upon it, but must conform to a scientific and orderly scheme, for which in

the last resort the Supreme Government should be held accountable, whether it be for praise or blame."

The first step was taken with the calling together of a Conference at Simla 'to consider the system of education in India.' Every member of the Conference, barring Dr. Miller of the Madras Christian College, was a Government officer, and not a single Indian was appointed to that body. As even a warm admirer like Mr. Lovat Fraser has admitted, "Lord Curzon had said in Calcutta that he wanted to ascertain the trend of authoritative opinion; what he heard was the trend of official opinion."

The Viceroy opened the Conference with a masterly speech covering the whole field of Indian education. While pointing out the many defects which had crept into the system, he declared that he dissociated himself from those who held that the experiment of imparting an English education to an Asiatic people was a mistake. There had been blunders, but the successes were immeasurably greater, and the moral and intellectual standard of the community had been raised. He did not want to disparage and pull down, for his whole object was to reconstruct and build up.

The Conference was followed by the appointment of a Commission in January, 1902, to consider the problem in all its bearings, and to suggest ways and means for placing the system of higher educa-

tion on a sound and enduring basis. Mr. (now Sir) Thomas Raleigh was appointed chairman. The personnel of the Commission, with the exception of the inclusion of Mr. Gurudas Bannerji, a Judge of the Calcutta High Court, who later appended a dissenting minute, was not calculated to inspire confidence. Its labours, however, were watched with keen and anxious interest, and the leaders of the people in all the provinces spared no efforts to place the Indian point of view before the Conference. Among them, none took a more notable part than Pherozechah. In the memorandum which jointly with Mr. (now Sir) Chimanlal Setalvad, he submitted to the Commission, he deprecated the idea of making any revolutionary changes in the constitution of the Universities. He argued that the Senate and the Syndicate had worked very satisfactorily on the whole, and did not call for any radical reform. As regards examinations, he was of opinion that too much importance had been given to them as a test of knowledge and culture. The real aim must be to secure efficient training, and this could only be achieved by insisting upon persons of the highest academical qualifications as professors, the University being given greater powers of supervision, and by reducing the number of examinations, and modifying the existing system of determining the success or failure of candidates. The frequency of examinations interfered with freedom

and variety of teaching, encouraged cram, put an unnecessary strain on students, and gave them little time to digest what they had learnt. He finally urged that the recognition or affiliation of colleges should be left entirely to the University. In his lengthy examination before the Commission on the 4th March, 1902, he elaborated the position he took up in this memorandum.

The Commission made a somewhat hurried tour of the country, and was ready with its recommendations in June, 1902. When the report was published, its reactionary character raised a storm of protest in all parts of the country. It was felt that an attempt was being made, not at the reform of existing institutions, but at their wholesale destruction, and that a system was proposed to be substituted, which was calculated to do away with the popular basis of education. Briefly summarized, the recommendations of the Commission amounted to a raising of college fees and examination standards, a reconstitution of the Syndicate and the Senate, the imposition of stringent conditions with regard to the recognition of affiliated institutions, and a general discouragement by various devices of private enterprise in the field of education. The Commission laid down that in all matters relating to higher education, efficiency must be the first and paramount consideration. It was "better for India that a comparatively small number of young men

should receive a sound liberal education, than that a large number should be passed through an inadequate course of instruction leading to a depreciated degree."

The Report with the observations of the Government of India was sent to local governments, and in due course came before the University of Bombay, which appointed a committee to deal with it. The latter, under the guidance, chiefly of Pherozeshah, subjected the recommendations of the Commission to a searching examination, and drew up a report which completely knocked them on the head. In moving its adoption at a meeting of the Senate held on the 14th February, 1903, Pheroze-shah dwelt with considerable force on the reactionary character of the conclusions arrived at by the Commission. He said he had been a Fellow for over thirty-five years—being one of the young men, fresh from college, whom Sir Alexander Grant thought fit to be associated in the work of the University which had manufactured them—but during all that period he did not remember a more momentous matter brought for the consideration of the Senate than the one under consideration. Referring in the first place to the Despatch of 1854, he pointed out that its distinguished authors had laid down no misleading efficiency test, but had deliberately preferred a wide expanse of general knowledge, though not of the highest value. When, therefore,



the Universities Commission moralized in the concluding paragraphs of their report that 'efficiency must be the first and paramount consideration,' they were approaching the problem, not from a statesman's point of view but from that of a pedagogue. The logical consequence of such an attitude would be to discredit primary education altogether, and to abolish all secondary schools unless they led up perforce to colleges.

As regards the personnel of the Commission, Pherozeshah said he wished to speak with due respect of the able and accomplished men who composed it, but he was not aware that they were men who possessed any special or commanding qualifications for the task entrusted to them. They had, besides, not considered it necessary to base or fortify their conclusions upon the evidence which they had collected in a hurry as they rushed from place to place. It could not, therefore, be a matter for complaint if their recommendations had no more weight attached to them than those of any other seven men throughout the kingdom of equivalent qualifications, on subjects on which the most eminent men of English or Continental Universities were not yet agreed.

Coming to the recommendations of the Commission, Pherozeshah did not desire to go into a detailed discussion. As regards the changes proposed in the constitution of the University he

was of opinion that there was no occasion to tinker with it. All that was required was a generous introduction of the elective principle in the nomination of Fellows. The talk about the unwieldy and unexpert character of the Senate was a great deal exaggerated. The Commission had claimed that the reformed Senate proposed by them would in the main be a body of experts, who would be protected against the incursion of voters, brought together in large numbers only by the prospect of an election, or, by a debate on some question which had been agitated out of doors. On behalf of the Senate, Pherozeshah repelled the charge as inaccurate, illiberal and uncharitable. He wound up by expressing his surprise that in the matter of administrative reforms, the Commission should have seriously set to work to recommend for all time courses of study to be adopted by the Universities for the Arts and Science degrees. He thought the work could be properly left to the constituted bodies in each University to arrange from time to time in the light of increasing experience, and in consonance with local circumstances, conditions and requirements.

The report was adopted by the Senate. In getting the committee and the Fellows to accept it, Pherozeshah may be regarded as having scored a distinct personal success. Mr. Gokhale, who saw an advance copy of the report, wrote to Pheroze-

shah from Calcutta, paying a notable tribute of admiration :—

“ That you should have got the European members of the Committee to join in all your criticisms and proposals, except one, is a remarkable triumph for us all, and everybody must recognize that it has been achieved mainly owing to your great tact and influence and your powerful personality. It is felt here that if the Bombay Senate adopt this report—as most probably will now be the case—the opposition to the Commission’s recommendations will be enormously strengthened. They have no hope here of getting their own Senate to condemn the Report as ours has done, or rather will shortly do, and the difference in calibre and political grit between their leaders and ours is, therefore, at present being freely recognized here. You know how emotional these people are, and how easily swayed. The very men, who, after the Congress of 1901, were violent in their denunciations of your and Mr. Bannerji’s high-handedness in extinguishing Nundy’s Indian Congress Committee, are now praising you to the skies, and recognizing in you—very justly—the greatest political leader in India of our time.”

An even more striking testimony to the dominant

part played by Pherozeshah in the memorable fight over the question of University reform was given years after by one of his ablest and most determined opponents :—

“ The hostility with which Lord Curzon’s schemes of educational reform were met was to a great extent the work of one remarkable man. In India, as in some other countries, the politicians who exercise the strongest influence are not always those who are constantly in the public eye. It was so in this instance, and the man who really stimulated and kept alive the fight against University reform is worth a little attention, for he played a great part in Indian political life during Lord Curzon’s Viceroyalty, and his influence was not less potent because it was often unseen. Sir Pherozeshah Mehta was at that time unquestionably the strongest and ablest politician in India . . . . . The University lay near his heart. He viewed with indignation the proposals for reform, and thought—I am quite sure in all sincerity, and I know him well—that they were misguided. He set himself to stimulate opposition, and succeeded only too well. His friends in Bengal perhaps needed little encouragement from elsewhere; but the persistent antagonism of Sir Pherozeshah

Mehta had more to do with the difficulties which Lord Curzon experienced in the later years of his Viceroyalty than any other single factor.”\*

After months of heated discussion of the Report of the Commission all over the country, the Universities Bill, which was largely based on its recommendations, was introduced into the Legislative Council on the 2nd November, 1903. Its principal features were thus explained by the Viceroy, whose personality was stamped on every phase of the long-drawn controversy :—

“ Its main principle is to raise the standard of education all round, and particularly of higher education. What we want to do is to apply better and less fallacious tests than at present exist, to stop the sacrifice of everything in the colleges, which constitute our University system, to cramming, to bring about better teaching by a superior class of teachers, to provide for closer inspection of colleges and institutions which are now left practically alone, to place the Government of the Universities in competent, expert and enthusiastic hands, to reconstitute the Senates, to define and regulate the powers of the Syndicates, to give statutory recognition to the elected

\*Mr. Lovat Fraser's *India under Lord Curzon and After*, pp. 191-193.

Fellows who are now only appointed on sufferance, . . . . to show the way by which our Universities, which are now merely examining Boards, can ultimately be converted into teaching institutions ; in fact, to convert higher education in India into a reality instead of a sham."

Such were the principles of the Bill as enunciated by its chief sponsor. Indian opinion refused, however, to accept the Viceroy's estimate of the scope and purpose of his pet scheme, and the agitation continued unabated. The Senate of the Bombay University appointed a committee to consider the Bill. It lost no time in submitting its report, which came up for discussion on the 21st December. In moving its adoption, P'herozezshah delivered another heavy indictment against the changes proposed to be introduced. At the outset, he desired to clear the position of those like himself who had strenuously opposed the so-called reforms which had been sought to be fastened upon the educational system in the country. He did not complain of the persistent misrepresentations of their attitude. He always held that intentions must be judged by acts and surrounding circumstances, and he regarded the solemn exhortations to avoid imputing motives as in most cases unmitigated cant. The honourable member in charge of the Bill, Mr. Thomas Raleigh, had said :—

“No corporate body cares to admit that its constitution needs improvement. If Parliament had waited for the consent of the University of Oxford, the statutes of Archbishop Laud might still be considered sufficient for all practical purposes ; Professors might still be performing their duties as in the undergraduate days of Adam Smith ; and college tutors might be following in the steps of the gentlemen on whom Gibbon conferred unenviable immortality by describing them in his autobiography.”

To this charge, Pherozeshah retorted that the opposition to reform generally proceeded from corporations whose members benefited by their wealthy endowments, or by the possession of great power. The Senates of the Indian Universities were rich neither in the one nor the other. They were wealthy only in the opportunities they afforded to non-official Fellows of being abused and ridiculed and maligned when they endeavoured to introduce reforms suggested by their special knowledge of native capacities, needs and requirements. Mr. Raleigh had dealt mainly in assumptions, and had no practical experience of the Indian University system. His colleagues could only give him a one-sided view, and had brought to bear upon the problems an interested and prejudiced mind. The public might, therefore, well

be forgiven for presuming that "a Commission constituted in a one-sided manner was constituted for the purpose of making a one-sided report."

The masterful Viceroy had framed an even more formidable indictment than that of his colleague. He had declared he could not imagine a worse reflection upon the educated classes in India, or a more crushing condemnation of the training they had been given than that they should band themselves together to stereotype existing conditions, or to defeat the first genuine attempt at reform that had been made for a quarter of a century. He had exhorted them to dismiss from their minds "all the wild talk about killing higher education, and putting education under the heels of Government." Pherozechah said he accepted that assurance. He was willing to believe that that might not be the purpose and policy of Lord Curzon. But, he asked :—

"What guarantee is there that the same purpose and policy may not be revived, and with the absolute control which this Bill vests in Government the latter may not use it as an instrument, not for the purposes aimed at by the Viceroy, but for the purpose of clipping the wings of higher education, solely with the view of abolishing this bugbear of Anglo-Indians, the so-called discontented and conceited B. A. ?"



*The Englishman*, Pherozeshah continued, had frankly admitted some months before that one of the main objects of the proposed reforms was that the direction of University education should thenceforward be "under European control," and that the Universities should therefore be "under the domination of the Government through such a new constitution as may be established by legislation." That was the real drift and purpose of the Bill taken as a whole, and most of the other features occupied a subordinate place and were of doubtful utility. What was certain was that a clean sweep had been made of the integrity and independence of the Senate, which had been such valuable factors of healthy growth in the past. Was that a consummation, Pherozeshah asked in conclusion, to which the Fellows of the Senate would give their approval, or would they not rather resist it to the utmost of their power, however little it might be ?

The speech was loudly cheered, and contributed not a little to the practically unanimous adoption of the report. *The Times of India*, which through thick and thin had warmly supported the policy of Lord Curzon, and which in turn was to receive a flattering testimony from the idol of its worship, put in a powerful plea for the Bill. It was sorry to find Pherozeshah among those who were determined not to be convinced :—

“ Among the many and varied qualities which have made the Honourable Mr. Mehta what he is, the one picturesque figure of Bombay politics, he will not, we are sure, grudge us the pleasure of placing something of the aptitudes of the sophistical rhetorician. In the speech which he made at the University on the 21st December, Mr. Mehta gave the fullest play to these aptitudes. Mr. Mehta enjoined on his hearers at the outset that they should disregard the solemn exhortations to avoid imputing motives as unmitigated cant, and to consider the question before them as they would a criminal case. That was, to say the least of it, a very remarkable adjuration to be uttered in what ought to be the home and sanctuary of the highest and the best in the life of a people. It might be expected that after expounding this cynical doctrine, the honourable gentleman would not have cared to complain of a real or fancied similar treatment on the part of others. But quite three-fourths of his speech was a prolonged wail over what this or that person had said of the motives or manner of the opposition to University reform. We have never been slow to recognize Mr. Mehta's abilities, but

we shall not be in haste to adopt his political precepts . . . . . Nothing has been more painful to us than the open contempt with which Mr. Mehta permitted himself to speak of educationists as a class. Such expressions generally come home to roost, and even in the fields of life which he has made his own, Mr. Mehta will not be long in reaping the reward of such a sowing of the wind.”\*

The Universities Bill survived the hammer-strokes of Pherozeshah and the rapier-thrusts of Mr. Gokhale, who condemned the measure in a masterly speech in the Imperial Legislative Council. Under democratic forms of government, the speeches of these two men would have sealed the fate of the Bill ; or, it may be, the measure might not have received the wholesale condemnation it did at the hands of its critics, and might have passed into law, shorn of its most objectionable features. But it is one of the inevitable consequences of systems of administration which are autocratic in character, that large measures of policy have to come into existence without any real assistance or guidance on the part of leaders of thought in the country. Criticism is not very helpful and tends to be merely destructive when the critic feels he has no hand in the shaping

of the measures he discusses, and that the only useful thing he can do is to attack the weakest points and the most objectionable features.

Lord Curzon on the eve of his retirement from the country claimed that out of the storm over the Universities legislation "had been born a new life for Higher Education in India." That contention, it is feared, cannot be borne out by the facts. In the first place, many of the reforms languished for want of the necessary driving force after Lord Curzon's retirement from the country. In the next place, they did not quite go to the root of the problem, and were undoubtedly vitiated by a desire to place higher education under the more or less direct control of Government. It cannot be denied, of course, that the Universities legislation achieved a certain amount of good,—it would have been very strange indeed if it had been otherwise—and one finds it difficult to join in the wholesale condemnation the measure received at the hands of its critics. For one thing, the Senates of the various Universities, thanks mainly to Government, had been previously constituted in a manner little calculated to promote their usefulness. In Bombay, the Fellows numbered over 300, and many of them were unencumbered with any educational qualifications. One is almost inclined to agree with Mr. Lovat Fraser when he says that the Fellowship was regarded as "a

minor distinction, useful for staving off importunate people who craved recognition, and ranking with, but after, the then equally empty honour of enrolment as a Justice of the Peace." Again, there was a great deal of truth in the statement of the Commission that "in a rightly governed University, examination is subordinate to teaching. In India, teaching has been made subservient to examination." Such a state of things undoubtedly called for a remedy. But the reforms which were introduced were in the nature of a sweeping condemnation of the existing order of things, and yet failed to touch the really weak spot in the system. As Pherozeshah had observed in his first speech before the Senate :—

"The fact is that the Commission has missed to give adequate and emphatic prominence to the great remedy for all the defects and shortcomings of our educational system for higher education. It was pointed out years ago by Sir Alexander Grant and Sir Raymond West and by many of us in later times. No Commission was required to tell Government that before any other reform was taken in hand, it was most essential to put the Government High Schools and Colleges intended to serve as models of such institutions in a fit condition to do their full work. As Sir Raymond

West more than once pointed out, our present schools and colleges are grossly insufficiently equipped and grossly insufficiently provided with necessary appliances and materials. I appreciate as well as any other person the importance of elevating educational ideals, but this object can be secured, without impairing the popular basis, by providing well-equipped and well-supplied models. Whatever there is unsatisfactory in the turn-out of our University system is mainly due to the default of Government in this respect."

It is a matter for infinite regret that so vital a problem as that of higher education should have been made the play-ground of factions, and should have been fought as an issue between officialdom on the one hand, and the popular party on the other. It was pre-eminently a question on which the combined wisdom of the Government and the educated classes ought to have been brought to bear for its right solution. Mr. Lovat Fraser has said that the problem, whether it is approached by Englishmen or Indians, invariably "stimulates prolixity, tends to the development of the most dogmatic opinions, develops bitterness in the most unexpected quarters, and frequently ends by becoming enveloped in a curious vagueness of thought." This is but a partial and somewhat

misleading statement of the case. The real reason why the question of education has hitherto defied a right solution lies in the fact that the interests of true learning have often been relegated to the background, and political considerations have been almost systematically allowed to dominate and vitiate the outlook and to preclude the possibility of a fair and dispassionate consideration of a problem more intimately bound up than any other we know of with the progress and development of the country.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### OFFICIAL RECOGNITION—PHEROZESHAH AND LORD CURZON—THE CORPORATION AND THE ROYAL VISIT. 1904-1905.

HONOURS' lists in India, as in other countries, are seldom marked by any originality or distinctive features. With monotonous regularity, decorations descend upon certain well-defined types of people, whose only merit very often is a faithful discharge of their duties towards the State as conceived by those in authority. Now and then, a bold attempt is made to go outside the magic circle of mediocrity, servility and officialdom in which the Honours' List revolves, and a grateful public, prone to attach exaggerated importance to a prefix or a suffix, rejoices that merit has at length been "rewarded."

Such was the case when the Birthday Honours' list of 1904 announced the conferment on Pherozeshah of the dignity of a K.C.I.E. It must be accounted to the credit of Lord Curzon that he did not hesitate to recommend for distinction his most formidable opponent, and that he did not allow



differences of opinion to obscure his appreciation of Pherozeshah's eminence as a public leader. The event caused widespread satisfaction. All shades of opinion united in recognizing that the honour could not have been better bestowed. "E'en the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear to cheer." *The Englishman* wrote about his genial personality, and his brilliant abilities as a lawyer and a leader of thought, which would lend distinction to the title conferred upon him. *The Times of India*, one of the most vigorous critics of the Bombay leader, came out with a handsome appreciation, which showed that it was not unmindful of the conventions which must govern the relations of public men in all healthily-constituted societies :—

“Perhaps, the most interesting feature of the list is the Knight Commandership of the Order of the Indian Empire conferred upon the Honourable Mr. Pherozeshah Mehta. There have been frequent occasions when we have found ourselves in antagonism to Mr. Mehta upon controversial questions. But we have never failed to recognize that he is unquestionably the ablest representative of the non-official native community now in public life in India. This Presidency is proud to claim him as one of her sons. But his reputation

and his work alike have extended over the whole country. To great experience, sound judgment, a cool head and an exceptional gift of eloquence, he adds a sturdy courage in opposition and a resolute and unswerving independence which have long earned for him the admiration of his supporters and the respect of those who sometimes differ from his views. Time has mellowed and chastened the perhaps unrestrained ardour of Mr. Mehta's earlier years, but one honourable characteristic has been exemplified throughout his whole career. He has never stooped to palter with his own convictions in order to earn official approval, but has fearlessly fought for the right as he conceived it. An alert and strenuous antagonist, he has never forgotten that meed of courtesy to opponents which is one of the finest traits of English public life, and in that respect, as in many other ways, he has set an example which some of his compatriots might well profit by . . . . Without him the Bombay Corporation as it exists to-day would be a body commanding in an appreciably less degree the confidence of the public. Had he done nothing else than exalt this high ideal of fine citizenship before his countrymen, he would have deserved well

of the Government. And in commending him to the notice of the Crown, Lord Curzon has shown that generous appreciation of great ability and strength and honesty of purpose, which one would have expected from a statesman of his reputation."

Telegrams and letters of congratulations from individuals and public bodies poured in from all over India. The Ripon Club gave him a public banquet, where Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy (the fourth of that name) presided, and spoke of him as "First among the Indian Bar; First among Indian Councillors; and First in the hearts of his countrymen,"—a somewhat quaint adaptation of the famous tribute paid to the greatest of America's sons. The students and old boys of the Elphinstone College gave him an entertainment, at which they presented him with a massive silver centre-piece, which he treasured among his proudest possessions. The citizens of Hyderabad and Secunderabad and the Parsis of Karachi sent messages of congratulations and good wishes. The public of Ahmedabad presented him with an address full of felicitous references to his character, career and attainments. Amongst these and other tributes of affection and admiration Pherozeshah probably valued none more than the unique demonstration of regard which he received from the Bombay Corporation and his

colleagues on that body. The first to give expression to the general sentiment was the President, Mr. James Macdonald, one of the oldest and best-known figures of the day in the public life of the City. In a brief but happy reference from the chair at an ordinary meeting of the Corporation, before the regular business was commenced, he expressed his gratification that "one who was unquestionably the ablest representative of the non-official native community now in public life in India" should at length receive the distinction to which his many valuable services had so long entitled him. In honour of the occasion he wished he could with propriety call upon his colleagues to give such a cheer for Sir Pherozezshah as would shake the walls to the very foundation, whereupon the members promptly took the hint, and cheered to the echo.

A few days afterwards, on the 14th July, a special meeting of the Corporation was held in answer to a requisition signed by 64 members, for the purpose of passing a resolution congratulating their leader on the honour conferred upon him. There was an unusually full attendance of members, and the visitors' galleries were packed with the general public. Many well-known citizens were accommodated in the hall. The proposition was moved by Sir Bhalchandra Krishna, seconded by Mr. Ibrahim Rahimtulla and supported by

Colonel Dimmock and a host of other speakers, who racked their brains to discover what could be said of Pherozeshah, which had not been said hundreds of times before, or which could adequately express the admiration which his great talents and unique services commanded everywhere. The resolution recorded the great and valuable work done by him for the country and the Empire in manifold directions, and the exemplary self-sacrifice and rectitude of purpose with which he had rendered unique services to the city of Bombay for more than a generation.

The Corporation felt that the event required signalizing in a still more marked fashion, and the meeting was followed by a banquet a few days later. It gave an opportunity to Pherozeshah of paying a tribute to the men, official as well as non-official, who had made local self-government in Bombay what it was. As regards his own success, he attributed it to the training and discipline he had acquired by long years of contact with the stalwarts of an earlier generation, European as well as Indian. They were men of great culture and ability, and they had shed lustre on the public life of Bombay. There were men of the type of Forbes, Maclean, Geary, Hancock, Martin Wood, Naoroji Furdunji, Vishvanath Mandlik and Sorabji Bengali, to mention only a few notable personalities indeed, whose

memory deserved to be written in letters of gold in the municipal history of Bombay.

Passing on to another theme, Pherozechah dilated at some length on what had often been said as to his leadership. In connection with that, he said he wanted to make the confession that instead of leading he rather followed the Corporation ! The idea tickled his hearers, and the remark was greeted with loud laughter. But Pherozechah gravely went on to explain the phenomenon. The fact was this : he watched the trend of opinion of his colleagues on any given question ; he tried to give out his own views with the object of evoking other views, and by these means he found out on which side the correct opinion lay. That had been his invariable practice for years, and he found from experience that the Corporation in almost all cases took a sound common-sense view of matters, and because he was able to fall in with that common-sense view, he was curiously said to be leading the Corporation ! As a dialectical exercise, this piece of reasoning was certainly amusing, though not expected to carry conviction to a public to whom Pherozechah and the Corporation were synonymous terms. The real explanation of his leadership—and it was one which those who three years later attempted his overthrow overlooked, and which could not obviously have come from his own lips—lay in the fact that he was almost invariably in the right,

and that it was impossible not to be convinced by his arguments, fortified as they were by a shrewd judgment and vast knowledge and experience of public affairs.

## II.

There had not been wanting uncharitable critics who had whispered that the K.C.I.E. was a sop thrown to a formidable enemy, which might result in moderating the vehemence of his opposition and the strength of his attacks. They were soon to find out that they did not really know the man. Not many months after, the very Viceroy who had so generously appreciated his merits, received from Pherozeshah a severe castigation on the occasion of his return to India to reassume the reins of government, when a section of the Corporation proposed to honour him with an address of welcome. It at once called forth a strong but unavailing protest from Pherozeshah.

For Lord Curzon's early career, Pherozeshah had unbounded admiration. During his second term of office in the Imperial Council, he came much in contact with the brilliant Viceroy, whose great capacity and energy were universally recognized. Lord Curzon was then at the height of his popularity, and none foresaw the develop-

ment in him of that spirit of obscurantism and love of power which were his undoing, and which destroyed the brilliant promise of his early career. At the public meeting held in Calcutta in February, 1899, in aid of the Famine Fund, when Lord Curzon was in the chair, Pherozeshah spoke of him as one who had unbounded affection and sympathy for the country and its people, and whose energy and force of character kept pace with his love and sympathy. Later on in September, when moving in the Corporation for an address of welcome to be presented to the Viceroy on the occasion of his intended visit to Bombay in the cold weather, Pherozeshah declared that in everything he had done, he had been guided by the noblest instincts of a statesman, and had always recognized the fact that the people of India ought to be governed in a spirit of sympathy and consideration, and with a steadfast regard for the feelings and sentiments of the various communities that inhabited this vast country. The address was drafted by Pherozeshah himself, and was so generous in its praise that it was actually characterized by the then President as fulsome. Little did Pherozeshah then imagine that in the same hall he would have to stand up four years later and denounce the very Viceroy whose praises he was singing so generously. The proposition which called for the performance of this disagreeable



duty which he would fain have avoided, asked for the adoption of a cordial address of welcome to Lord Curzon on his arrival in Bombay to assume the Viceroyalty for a second time. It was moved by Mr. Hormusji Chothia, a well-known solicitor and an energetic member of the Corporation, and seconded by Colonel Dimmock. Pherozeshah felt it to be an imperative duty to oppose the proposition. He observed with regret that most of the important measures of Lord Curzon's administration, had not been in conformity with his declarations and assurances :—

“ The curtailment of the municipal franchise in Calcutta, the inauguration of a similar policy in Madras, the passing of the Official Secrets Act, the Universities Act, the withdrawal of competitive tests for entrance in the Provincial Service, and above all, the tampering with the declared policy of the Crown for the government of this country, as in the time of Lord Lytton, by misconstruing the words of the Great Proclamation of 1858, these are measures which we keenly deplore as most retrograde, reactionary and unwise. Rightly or wrongly, we believe that these measures are calculated to upset and revolutionize, or to use a more classic phrase, to break the continuity of that policy of righteous-

ness which, though not always acted upon and sometimes submerged in turbulent waves, was never so openly denied to be the declared and unalterable policy of the Crown for the good government of this country as during Lord Curzon's administration. These injudicious measures have provoked sorrowful regret and sorrowful protest throughout a greater portion of this land. That being so, and holding views adverse to those expressed by the supporters of this proposition, I find it impossible to conscientiously join in the presentation of any Address in which, directly or indirectly, approval is given to measures of the character I have just described."

In the end, Pherozeshah showed himself willing to meet the mover of the proposition half-way, and to agree to a formal address of welcome to Lord Curzon as Viceroy and representative of the Sovereign, but not as Governor-General and Head of the Administration. Mr. Chothia having declined the compromise, Pherozeshah moved an amendment embodying his suggestion, which was thrown out by 27 votes against 26. It was a rare experience for Pherozeshah. For once, the body which used loyally to register his decrees failed him, and the significance of it was not lost on the public or himself. Slowly the forces were rising,

which three years later culminated in the infamous Caucus which convulsed all Bombay, and brought shame and humiliation on her civic life.

### III.

The strenuous, masterful and epoch-making régime of Lord Curzon was drawing to a close amidst a bitterness and resentment, which were in painful contrast to the brilliant promise of his earlier years. Measure after measure calculated to excite disaffection and alarm had emanated from the restless brain of the Viceroy intent on doing his duty, and heedless of the currents of national life and thought. His was a mind which appeared to be incapable of understanding "the springs of human action, the weaknesses and passions of men, their inexplicable enthusiasms and those fierce heroisms that make them 'ready to do battle for an egg or die for an idea.' " Popular liberty in any shape or form was unintelligible to a mind rooted in scorn of the people. He made a fetish of efficiency, and forgot that good government can never be a substitute for government by the people themselves. In the result, a tremendous wave of unrest swept over the country, and sedition and anarchism began to rear their ugly heads. It was in such an atmosphere, charged

with elements dangerous to the safety of the State, that His Majesty King George, then Prince of Wales, came out to India to give the watch-word of sympathy to those who were administering his vast dominions with a despotism popularly known as "benevolent," and which, consequently, they had come to look upon as a virtue.

The announcement of the Prince's visit evoked unbounded enthusiasm, and preparations were made to give him a welcome worthy of his exalted position, and expressive of the feelings and sentiments with which Indians are apt to regard the Royal House. Bombay, as the Gateway of India, bestirred itself early to give a reception befitting the historic occasion. Considering that the President of the Corporation would have a prominent part to play in the functions which were to be held in honour of the royal visit, it was a matter of some importance to select a man who would lend distinction to the position. Many ambitious men cherished a desire to strut on the stage at this juncture, and an exciting contest might have been witnessed, had not the Corporation instinctively turned to the one man on whom it fell back whenever a difficult situation was created.

It was more than twenty years before that Pheroza Shah had occupied the chair of the Corporation. During that long period he had kept himself untrammelled by the restraints of office,

and had ruled the Corporation with a firmness, wisdom and moderation, which had earned for that body a high reputation among the self-governing institutions in the country. People had got so used to his role of dictator, that it was difficult to conceive the idea of his settling down comfortably in the presidential chair, and listening patiently and helplessly to long-winded discussions on all manner of subjects. But the occasion was unique, and the Corporation felt the need of its being represented by the man who, more than anyone else, had enriched and exalted civic life in Bombay.

The election was made in April, 1905, with a cordiality and unanimity, and received by the public with an enthusiasm, which were a striking testimony to the position which Pherozeshah occupied in the public life of Bombay. The speeches made on the occasion were of the usual character. They drew from Pherozeshah the remark that he could scarcely recognize himself in the extremely ideal picture which had been drawn of him.

The strength of character and independence of spirit, which were among the leading characteristics of the new President, were unexpectedly called into requisition a few months later. The Municipal Secretary at his desire had written to Government, and invited their attention to the notification issued in connection with the visit to Bombay

in 1875 of the then Prince of Wales, in which the Chairman of the Corporation had been given a prominent place in the reception of His Royal Highness on the steps of the Apollo Bunder. The Secretary expressed a hope that the same arrangements would be observed on the present occasion. No notice seems to have been taken of this communication, which was followed by a Press-note which showed that the President, the Commissioner and the Sheriff of Bombay were not included among those who were to receive Their Royal Highnesses on their landing at the Bunder.

The announcement was received with surprise and indignation. The Corporation felt that a deliberate slight had been offered to it, and through it to the City, and an informal meeting was held, at which it was resolved to address Government and convey to them the feelings which their action had evoked. Something in the nature of a sensation had been created, and speculation was rife as to the outcome of the negotiations between the two bodies. What would the Corporation do, if the Secretariat remained obdurate? There were all sorts of rumours in the town. That the Corporation was determined to settle the question of its rights and privileges once for all, was apparent to all who watched its temper. Some members were prepared to go the length of moving an adjournment of the "meeting" at the Bun-

der at which the address was to be presented ! Imagine such a thing taking place at the very moment of the royal landing ! The authorities were alarmed, and the blundering official responsible for the arrangements, received a peremptory mandate to see the President and settle the matter with him. An informal meeting of the Corporation had been called to consider the situation on the 8th November, a day previous to the arrival of the august visitors, and no time was to be lost. At 2 in the afternoon, Mr. Edgerley, Chief Secretary to Government, drove down to Pherozeshah's place at Nepean Sea Road, and had a long interview with him, at which he was plainly given to understand the consequences of disregarding the wishes of the Corporation. Mr. Edgerley promised to convey the message at once to the Governor, and it was arranged that before the hour of the meeting either " Aye " or " No " was to be communicated to the President. A little before the appointed time, the fateful message arrived over the telephone at the Municipal Secretary's office, announcing the capitulation of Government. Pherozeshah received from Mr. Edgerley a wire at almost the same time with the cryptic message " Yes."

An atmosphere of suppressed excitement pervaded the meeting on the 8th, when the members gathered to discuss the situation. In a tactful

little speech, the President explained that he had been assured that a misunderstanding had taken place, and that no slight had been intended to be offered. The idea had been to work up the occasion in such a way that the welcome of the Corporation was to be the crown in the whole affair. Upon matters being explained to them, the Government had shown themselves willing to accede to the wishes of the Corporation. The President added he accepted the explanation readily, and recognized the cordial spirit in which the matter had been settled. This tactful utterance soothed the audience, and silenced the angry criticisms which were too ready to burst forth. Thus ended an incident which afforded painful evidence of the utter lack of imagination in the official mind. The matter was at best a trivial one, but through the perversity of the Olympians of the Secretariat, it threatened to create an extremely unpleasant situation at a moment when all classes of people were preparing to extend a warm and enthusiastic welcome to the royal messenger of peace and goodwill. That the incident left no bitterness behind, and was forgotten as soon as it was ended, was largely due to the tact and friendly spirit with which Pherozeshah, while firmly upholding the dignity and authority of the Corporation, met the belated overtures of Government.

The address was presented in a gaily-decorated



*shamiana* at the Bunder in the presence of a large and brilliant assemblage. It had been drafted by the President himself, and was dignified and full of felicitous references. After the presentations had been made, Pherozeshah stepped forward, and read the address, according to a newspaper report, in "clear strident tones." When it was over, he proceeded to the *dais* to present it, and to perform the pleasing oriental ceremony of offering bouquets and garlanding the illustrious visitors. For once in his life, it was observed that the fearless and formidable politician who held all India in his grip was somewhat ill at ease. He advanced to the *dais* with some hesitation, and Their Royal Highnesses and Lord Curzon were seen to smile at his embarrassment. The Prince expressed his thanks for the magnificent preparations made by the City in his honour, and expressed the gratification of himself and the Princess at what they had seen. The royal pair then warmly shook hands with Pherozeshah, who called for three cheers which were lustily given. It was a reception worthy of the City and the Corporation, and deeply impressed the illustrious visitors.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE BATTLE OF THE CLOCKS—

#### THE CAUCUS.

1906-1907.

THE Prince's noble appeal for sympathy was still ringing in the ears, when Bombay was thrown into a ferment over a controversy, which, at this distance of time, would appear somewhat trivial and silly. The restless energy of Lord Curzon resulted, among other things, in the introduction on the 1st July, 1905, of what was and is still known as Standard Time. Previous thereto, there was no uniformity; some places kept Madras or railway time, others their own local time. When the change was introduced by the Government of India, the Bombay Government and most public bodies put their clocks 39 minutes in advance of the local time.

The Corporation having been asked for its views in the matter, a resolution was passed on the 5th October, authorizing the President to inform Government that the Corporation would be prepared to adopt Standard Time for all municipal purposes. The Government having ascertained the views of

other public bodies, and found that there was a fairly large volume of opinion in favour of the change, announced that from the 1st January, 1906, Standard Time would be the official time for all purposes. When that resolution was communicated to the Corporation, some of the members showed a disposition to wriggle out of it, and by a narrow majority, it was decided on the motion of Sir Bhalchandra Krishna, a determined opponent of the change, that the municipal clocks should not be altered by the Commissioner without the express orders of the Corporation. This was not a very happy or logical way of settling the question, and in the January following, an energetic member, Dr. N. N. Katrak, moved that all municipal clocks should be set to Standard Time on and from the day after the passing of the resolution. When the division took place on this proposition, Pherozeshah, who was in the chair, declared that thirty-one members had voted for and thirty-one against the proposition, and lost no time in giving his casting vote against it. Thereupon, a poll was demanded, and the result was that the proposition was carried by 31 votes to 30.

All throw these proceedings, the muzzled lion felt very unhappy. He could do little more than sit helplessly and watch the fighting that was going on. It was known he was bitterly opposed to the innovation, and that he would take the earliest

opportunity after the muzzle was removed to upset the decision arrived at. Preparations were made in due time for the approaching struggle, and the weak and the wavering were attacked with much vigour and sought to be captured. The manœuvre caused alarm and indignation in the camp of the supporters of the new Time. It was alleged that the matter had become a purely personal issue. Pherozeshah had suffered a virtual defeat, and he was eager to wipe it out and maintain his supremacy.

The long-expected occasion arrived a few days after Pherozeshah had divested himself, amidst the plaudits of the Corporation, of the dignity of the presidential office. In accordance with a notice of motion, he moved on the 23rd April, 1906, that in view of the serious public inconvenience and hardship felt by the public, the Corporation were of opinion that Bombay Time should be reverted to, and that the Commissioner should be asked to set all municipal clocks accordingly. In support of the motion, Pherozeshah made a long and powerful speech, which occupied an hour and seven minutes in delivery. He denied that it was a personal matter with him. A mass meeting had been held under the chairmanship of Sir Bhalchandra Krishna, and a petition signed by over 15,000 citizens had been addressed to Government, which showed the strength of the feeling against

Standard Time. The mover traced the history of the agitation which had taken place when a similar attempt at uniformity had been made, and when the Government of Sir James Fergusson had had the wisdom to retrace their steps in deference to popular opinion. It was, therefore, neither fair nor reasonable to suppose that when the Government saw that the people of Bombay did not care for Standard Time, they would not reverse what they had done. Coming to the merits of the question, the mover pointed out that he could find no other instance in the whole world, in which it was proposed to have one time for so large a country as India. The new system was, besides, not of a scientific character at all. So far as he could make out, the only thing in favour of it was that it was convenient to the railway travelling public. But it was not suitable at all to the shipping and mercantile communities. Calcutta had so far not been pressed to introduce Standard Time, because public feeling there was strong on the point. But poor Bombay had fallen on evil days! The Government had not thought fit to consult the Indian population, or at least, a large majority of it, and Pherozeshah said he resented such a procedure :—

“I frankly tell you—you might call it a matter of sentiment or of prejudice—that the one important argument which bears upon the subject is the integrity, the dig-

nity and the independence of the City. It is not fair and proper that the population of the City should be driven like a flock of dumb cattle because the Chamber of Commerce and the Port Trust adopted Standard Time regardless of the special circumstances of the city of Bombay. This is one of the things which has influenced me in coming again to enter a strong protest against an action of this character—a measure adopted by Government without consulting the feelings and sentiments of the people, and without giving them an opportunity of expressing their opinion. Perhaps, it is a matter of mere sentiment and prejudice, but I will always take a pride in standing up for the integrity, the dignity and the independence of the immense population of the city of Bombay.”

The proposition was opposed, among a number of people, by Mr. Harrison, the Accountant-General, who was shortly to attain such an unenviable notoriety as the directing genius of the infamous Caucus. He observed that Pherozeshah had attained a deserved ascendancy in the Corporation, and it was a matter of deep disappointment, that in order to show that ascendancy, he had thought fit to drag in the mire the reputation of the Corporation for consistency, sobriety and good sense.

The voting was in the nature of a personal triumph for Pherozeshah, who was able to carry the motion by 31 votes against 22, a result which was loudly cheered. Little did they imagine, they who applauded it, what it was going to lead to, how it was to bring to a head the resolve which had been formed deep down in the hearts of a handful of men, who, unmindful of the immense services of Pherozeshah, bitterly resented his dominance in civic affairs. The local 'Thunderer' in a scathing article, which faintly foreshadowed the unscrupulous campaign that was soon to come, described the achievement as worthy of being inscribed on the golden rolls of fame beside the proudest annals of little Pedlington. It described Pherozeshah as the Sergeant Buzfuz of Bombay, and said he had the trick of the thing to a nicety and would have delighted Dickens. He had succeeded in making the Corporation look extremely ridiculous; but then that particular spectacle was not even invested with the doubtful charm of novelty! The issue had not been upon the merits of Standard Time; it had been upon the maintenance of the prestige of Pherozeshah. It was not difficult to demonstrate that it was a Pyrrhic victory. In due course, Pherozeshah would find that he had sadly overcalculated his strength. Ominous words, indeed, the significance of which was very shortly to be borne in upon the public.

The subsequent history of Standard Time may be briefly told in this place. In July, 1908, Mr. Harrison moved for the adoption of Standard Time by the Corporation, with a reservation in favour of the Crawford Market and Victoria Gardens clocks, which were to continue to be regulated by local time till otherwise ordered. Pherozechah moved an amendment for adjourning the debate on the question till the Governor-in-Council had dealt with the prayers addressed to him by a public meeting, which had been held on the 28th June, with the veteran Mr. Gokaldas Parekh in the chair, and which had petitioned Government to restore local time, and thereby remove an unnecessary cause of irritation and discontent. He was sorry Mr. Harrison had selected a time when the country was seething with unrest for agitating the question. It was a time when sober, thoughtful and discreet men of all races and creeds, and of all shades of opinions should have put their heads together to promote peace and harmony. It was not the time for adopting a policy of pin-pricks, and force the change on people who did not want it, and who were influenced more by sentiments and prejudices than by logic or historical arguments. This plea worthy of a consummate tactician, prevailed with the Corporation, including even Mr. Harrison and his henchmen, and the amendment was carried. The controversy was shelved indefinitely, and died



a natural death, though occasional attempts have been made to bring it to life again. The Crawford Market and the Victoria Gardens clocks still glory in Bombay Time, and proudly challenge vandal hands to touch them.

One cannot help feeling that all the excitement and bitterness roused by this little battle of the clocks was somewhat ridiculous. From a simple question of pushing forward the hands of the clock thirty-nine minutes, it came to be regarded as a sort of life and death contest between the popular party, headed by Pherozeshah, and the forces of officialdom. There was, of course, a good deal of unreasoning prejudice behind the determined opposition to the change, and even a feeling that a rude attack was being made upon the daily habits and observances of the people. But it was certainly a matter in which, had the influence of Pherozeshah been cast in the scale, a quick and easy reconciliation with the change would have undoubtedly taken place, and people would have soon forgotten that they had made a trifling change in the hands of the clock. But for once the great leader forebore to lead, and allowed his robust common sense to be affected by prejudice. His innate conservatism was not a little responsible for the tenacity and determination with which he fought the issue. It prevented his recognizing that uniformity of time has its advantages, however unscientific and

arbitrary the standard laid down, and that the Corporation itself was one of the bodies which had approved of the change, and thus made itself responsible for its inauguration in the City.

## II.

Two months after Pherozechah had secured the rejection of Standard Time, a movement was germinated, destined to convulse all Bombay, and threaten for a time seriously to impair that harmony between the different sections of her population, which has always been such a distinguishing characteristic of her public life. It was believed in certain quarters that "that third vote was a personal attempt to show the city who was master, to impose upon the Corporation a personal will in the face of its own opinion twice expressed." The opposition offered to the proposal for giving an address to Lord Curzon was another matter on which the enemies of the dictator fell foul of him. It was said he was growing too intolerant, and that his domination had reached a stage at which it brooked no opposition. The despot must be overthrown, his following must be crushed.

The father and promoter of this discreditable movement was Mr. Harrison, then Accountant-General to the Government of Bombay. Having conceived the idea of ridding the City of Pheroze-

shah's domination, he set about looking for allies, and found three men to help him, who, by the position they occupied, were capable of exercising a powerful influence on the course of events. First and foremost among them stood Mr. Lovat Fraser of *The Times of India*, a journalist who wielded a formidable pen and controlled a powerful newspaper. The others were Mr. Hatch, Collector of Bombay, and Mr. Gell, Commissioner of Police, whose official positions enabled them to dominate the Justices of the Peace, who were to be the instruments of the tortuous designs of the organizers of the movement. With the assistance of these men, Mr. Harrison began a series of manoeuvres without a parallel in the history of municipal elections in this, or, perhaps, in any other country in the world.

The General Elections to the Corporation were to come off in February, 1907. Pherozechah was a candidate as usual for one of the sixteen seats allotted to the Justices of the Peace. There were only about six hundred of the latter, and as a large number of them owed the "distinction" to the favour of some official or other, it was not a difficult task to manipulate the electorate. Hitherto, however, the Justices had exercised the franchise fairly judiciously, and had invariably paid Pherozechah the compliment of returning him to the Corporation on his bare intimation that he was seeking their suffrage. One of the first things the

organizers of the Caucus did was to issue a "ticket" containing the names of sixteen nominees of their choice, selected from the different communities, and pledged to break down the one-man-rule in the Corporation. Some of these precious candidates—"Independents" as they were dubbed with unconscious humour by the chief showman—were unwilling to achieve the fame which was sought to be thrust on them. But they were somehow swept into the net, and held up to the admiring gaze of the world as men of light and leading, who would regard all municipal questions on their merits, and vote according to their conscience!

Having formed his "ticket," Mr. Harrison, backed by his allies, commenced operations on a large scale. Beginning with his own subordinates, he tackled successively the various departments of the Secretariat, the Railways, the Indian Medical Service, the Collectors of Customs and of Land Revenue, and other officials holding important positions under Government. Pressure and persuasion were freely employed by the little band of Mr. Harrison's henchmen to get all Justices who hung on their favours, or feared their frowns, to vote solidly for the "ticket." There were many, however, including Englishmen, who, while they showed themselves willing to assist the movement, were anxious to vote for Pherozechah in recognition of his great services to the City. In the words of the

leading journal, whose columns were so freely employed in the service of the cause :—

“The little campaign which is in progress may or may not be successful, but if it is successful, it may involve the rejection of a particular personality. ‘Please don’t do that,’ say the waverers. ‘Think of his splendid and devoted services to the City. Attack his followers if you like, but leave him alone. Why, if he was not elected, it might humiliate him! We disapprove of his domination, but he must be let alone, because he has done good work, and means well at heart.’ And so they go their way, chanting their plaintive lay of ‘Woodman, spare that tree, touch not a single bough,’ in every place where men do congregate.”

*The Times of India* went on to ask the waverers to remember that rejection at the polls did not involve in England any personal humiliation at all. It instanced the cases of Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Balfour, Sir William Harcourt and Mr. John Morley, and observed that no one ever thought any the worse of them for their defeat. It was all a part of the game. By such sophistries, the little lingering doubts of the waverers were swept away. No effort was spared to bring to heel the imposing array of Government officials, contractors, pensioners and title-hunters who formed the bulk of

the electorate. Mr. Fraser went the length of sending a misleading cable to the Aga Khan, and using his reply for the purpose of influencing his followers. Neither the original cable nor the reply was ever published, though the Chief Judge of the Small Causes Court in the subsequent inquiry fined Mr. Fraser Rs. 50 for his persistent refusal to produce them.

As the election day drew near, public excitement rose to fever-heat. The Caucus was the one topic of conversation everywhere. A tremendous wave of feeling swept over Bombay, and touched even distant parts of the country. With the exception of the *Bande Mataram*, the *Mahratta* and papers of that ilk, the bitterest political opponents of Pherozeshah joined in denouncing the movement, and in recognizing the immense debt which Bombay owed to him. Day after day, the hapless Justices were appealed to, threatened, argued with. *The Times of India* on its side carried on a ceaseless and vigorous campaign in support of the sixteen "Independents," who were to put an end to the régime of Pherozeshah and his "Bondsmen." It asked the critics of the Caucus not to forget that the affairs of the City had for years past been practically decided in an unpretentious office which was no where near the Municipal Hall. In its final appeal, it told the electors that all that the "Independents" sought

to do was to settle civic affairs on civic lines. They would stand for true freedom in municipal life, and decline to make themselves the henchmen of any dictator. If they won, well and good. If not, Bombay would still enjoy the possession of her Boss, and make the best of him.

The appointed day, 22nd February, came at last, a day memorable in the civic annals of Bombay. The public had been admitted to the Hall, and the election took place amidst scenes of wild excitement. Mr. Shepherd, the Municipal Commissioner, was elected chairman of the "meeting" on the motion of Pherozeshah, who little realized the part he was playing behind the scenes. Just before the appointed hour, a large number of European Justices trooped into the Hall with their voting papers containing the names of the Caucus candidates ready signed in their pockets. The organizers of the movement had left nothing to chance. They did not want their voters to be worried, and thanks to the assistance they received from the Municipal Commissioner, and from their legal advisers who were always at hand, they had arranged that their stalwart supporters should not be troubled to do anything more than just step into the Hall, and hand over the voting papers. As soon, therefore, as the ballot box was opened, in went scores of papers supporting the "ticket." The voting throughout was very brisk, and the

supporters of both sides kept up a keen contest. Though a large majority of voters went to the poll with their minds made up, now and again an exciting tussle was witnessed. Pherozechah's position was the subject of anxious and constant inquiries. A large crowd inside the Hall and outside watched the course of events with bated breath, and occasionally relieved its feelings when it caught sight of some prominent member of the Caucus organization.

At the appointed hour, Mr. Shepherd declared the meeting closed. At this time, Mr. Fraser was observed to be standing close by the chairman, whereupon someone from the crowd called out "Times of India." At this a tremendous hiss went up. Mr. Fraser, however, faced the audience with complete self-assurance, and before leaving the Hall, shook hands with Pherozechah and wished him success! The "uncrowned King of Bombay" followed soon after amidst deafening cheers from the crowd, which threw flowers and bouquets at him, and garlanded him profusely. People began running after his carriage shouting "We don't want a Corporation without Sir Pherozechah," "Sir Pherozechah means the Corporation and the Corporation means Pherozechah," "One Pherozechah is worth a thousand Harrisons," and delivering themselves of such other observations as only a crowd can think of.



The result of the voting showed that the Caucus had triumphed all along the line. All its nominees except one got in, and the only outsider who found a place was Sir Dinshaw Petit, who had had the independence to refuse to have anything to do with so disgraceful a movement. He, too, would have failed but for an objection as regards a single vote raised against one of the candidates belonging to the Harrison gang. Pherozeshah stood seventeenth on the list, with 231 votes to his credit. The result was received with pain and indignation throughout the country. Newspapers and publicists of all shades of opinion gave expression to their feelings of resentment at the tactics which had succeeded in overthrowing the one man who had made the Bombay Corporation what it was, a model, despite all its faults, of local self-government in India. *The Madras Standard* observed that if the city of Bombay was so good a place to live in, and its municipal administration so efficient, it was in the main due to the patriotic labours of Pherozeshah. *The Indian Patriot* pointed out that his connection with the Corporation had raised it in the estimation of the public, and it was easy to realize that without him it would sink into insignificance, if it did not bring itself into contempt. These opinions reflected the sense of the whole country. If the Harrison-Fraser clique imagined that it had dealt an irreparable blow to the prestige of the dictator, a

rude awakening awaited it. He was never more popular than in the hour of his defeat. Conservatives who distrusted and disliked him, nationalists who had grown to fear and hate him, alike poured out their sympathy and admiration. A movement was started to raise a statue to him, and a large sum was subscribed, but as on previous occasions, the idea had to be abandoned out of deference to Pherozechah's wishes.

The defeat of Pherozechah at the poll was temporary. One of the Caucus candidates, Mr. Suleman Abdul Wahed, by reason of his having contracts with the municipality was disqualified, and Pherozechah as next on the list stepped into the place. Room had also in the meantime been made for him by Mr. Dikshit, one of his devoted lieutenants in the Corporation and the Council, who, out of a touching loyalty to his chief, had promptly refused to accept the seat in the Girgaum Ward to which he had been elected. This had provided an avenue through which Pherozechah had walked in. When Mr. Wahed's election was invalidated, however, Pherozechah resigned from the Girgaum Ward, and enabled Mr. Dikshit to rejoin the Corporation from which, with rare self-abnegation, he had chosen to retire.

The election was not allowed to pass unchallenged. A petition was filed in the Small Causes Court by Sir Bhalchandra Krishna and Messrs. H. A. Wadya

and J. B. Petit to set it aside on the ground of its not having been a free and fair one, and on account of objections as regards the change of date and the form of the voting papers. The legal issues arising in the case were decided by the Chief Judge, the late Mr. R. M. Patel, and the question of undue influence, by his successor Mr. Kemp, before whom a long and protracted trial took place, involving the taking of evidence of most of the leading figures in the Caucus movement. Some dramatic incidents were witnessed, some damaging disclosures were made, and many people had to look foolish in the course of this inquiry. The case was followed with keen interest, and was discussed for weeks on end. It resulted, however, as was not unexpected, in the election being upheld.

A representation made to Government by three non-official members of the Council, Messrs. Parekh, Setalvad and Dikshit, pointing out the gross impropriety of the interference of officials in the election, met with no better fate. It elicited a curt reply, in which the honourable members were told that the Government Resolution which forbade interference with the free choice of candidates related only to the elections to the Legislative Councils ! For sheer sophistry, and one might almost say dishonesty, nothing could beat this official manner of disposing of the question, and it showed quite conclusively, if any proof were needed, that the Harri-

son gang had the support of people in high places.

These and other such incidents kept public excitement over the affair at fever-heat. It culminated in the great demonstration which took place at Madhav Baug on the afternoon of 7th April. A mass meeting of the citizens of Bombay was called to give expression to the universal feeling of condemnation of the unconstitutional action of Government officials in interfering with the purity and freedom of the election, and to adopt a memorial to the Viceroy, praying for an inquiry into the affair. Long before the appointed hour, thousands of people of all communities flocked to the place, and filled every inch of space in the quadrangle and the halls. When the chairman, Mr. Gokhale, who had come down from Calcutta to attend the meeting, arrived; it was with great difficulty that he could make his way to the platform through the seething mass of humanity which surrounded the place. He received a rousing ovation. He was supported on the platform by a large number of leading citizens. The programme was a heavy one, but the vast crowd stood it with great good humour, though experiencing considerable discomfort from the heat and the crush. The speeches were equal to the occasion, and found an appreciative audience, which received the name of Pheroze-shah, whenever it was mentioned, with volleys of cheers, and which hissed to its heart's content

every time Mr. Harrison or *The Times of India* was mentioned. A passage from Mr. Gokhale's speech may be usefully quoted, as it bears on the oft-repeated charge about the autocracy of Pherozeshah :—

“ A man with the great transcendental abilities of Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, placing those abilities freely and unreservedly at the disposal of his city for nearly forty years, is bound to attain a position of unrivalled predominance in any Corporation and in any country. That such a man should tower head and shoulders above his fellowmen after such a record is only to be expected, and those who complain of this quarrel with the very elements of our human nature. Such predominance implies deep gratitude on the part of those to whose service a great career has been consecrated, joined to that profound confidence in the wisdom and judgment of the leader, which goes with such gratitude. Sir Pherozeshah's position in the Bombay Corporation is no doubt without a parallel in India, but there is a close parallel to it in the mighty influence exercised by Mr. Chamberlain at Birmingham, and is not dissimilar to the position occupied by Lord Palmerston for many years in Whig England, and later by the great Gladstone in the councils of the Liberal Party.”

The reply which the Government of India gave to the memorial adopted at the meeting was a curious piece of reasoning. They stated that as the matter had been fully investigated by the Courts, which had held that the officers who took part in the election had made no illegal use of their influence, the Government of India had no orders to pass in connection with the prayers of the memorialists. They added that in the case of an election by a body constituted as the Justices of the Peace, officers whose names were included in the list of voters could properly exercise a much wider freedom of action than in municipal elections of an ordinary type.

With the holding of the meeting, public excitement began to subside, and Bombay prepared to settle down and resume the even tenor of her existence. The first meeting of the newly-constituted Corporation, to the disappointment of a public eager for sensations, passed off smoothly and uneventfully. The valiant knights of the Caucus, who were to reform the municipal administration, and purge it of the taint which had so long affected it, were found to be very mild and harmless people. They certainly did not "stagger humanity" with their achievements. The dictator still remained master of the situation for all practical purposes. The ranks of his supporters had been thinned; his opponents had gained in

numerical strength. But the Corporation continued to be dominated by his presence and led by his powerful intellect. The Caucus had triumphed ; the Caucus had failed.

At this distance of time it is possible to take a dispassionate view of the doings of the Caucus, and the attitude of its organizers. It is interesting to recall, in passing, a fact, which is not generally known, that a somewhat similar movement took place as far back as 1880 in connection with an election by the Justices. Someone sent a " ticket " round containing the names of 10 English J. P.'s, and recommending the other six places being filled up as the electors liked, but from among the members of the English community. It was said the idea was to keep Pherozeshah out. But he managed to get the last place, chiefly through the votes of Indian Justices. Such stalwarts as Martin Wood, Tyabji and Telang were, however, knocked out. The principles for which the present Caucus stood, as proclaimed by its High Priest, were that it was bad for the Corporation and bad for the City that the Municipality should for ever be controlled and dominated by a single personality, or by a single set of individuals of the same ideas. This was, perhaps, sound in principle, but the " Independents " who preached it could find nothing else to object to than Pherozeshah's action on the question of Standard Time and the address to Lord Curzon.

They had no policy, no programme of their own. They could not indicate any differences of principle in regard to municipal administration, which divided them from Pherozechah and his party. And they dared not deny the immense services he had rendered to the cause of local self-government. Indeed, the very organ which had striven so hard to bring about his downfall, declared on the morrow of the election, when it gloated over the "sensational victory" the Caucus had achieved, that Pherozechah remained then, as he had been for years past, the ablest non-European, not only in Bombay, but probably in all India, and that the movement which had culminated in his utter defeat had never for a moment been intended to exclude him from civic affairs, in which his great experience would always be of the utmost value.

With these facts against them, the conclusion is irresistible that the whole movement from first to last was animated by personal hostility to Pherozechah. It was idle to say that the idea was to exclude him merely from the Justices electorate. The Harrison clique knew very well that nothing it could have done could have kept him out of a seat on the Corporation, so long as there were independent bodies of voters in the other constituencies. If the real object was to break Pherozechah's power and opportunities of domination, without depriving the Corporation of the benefit of



his unique experience of municipal affairs, it could have been achieved by overthrowing his following, the men whom he had made, the men, who, according to a widely-prevalent notion, spoke with his voice and saw with his eyes. If, accordingly, the organizers of the Caucus had included him in the "ticket," the movement would not have provoked that bitterness and hostility which it so abundantly aroused. But their idea was deliberately to throw him out and humiliate him, and their action could only mean that they did not regard him as worthy of being returned by the electorate whose suffrages he had sought. In a system of party government, when a man is thrown out by his constituency, it means his electors are out of sympathy either with his views or with those of his party, and are inclined to support the policy outlined by his opponent, which, for the time being at least, appeals to them strongly. But the Caucus had no programme, no policy, no ideas of its own. Its battle-cry was "Down with the dictator, away with his following." When that was accomplished, it fondly imagined its gallant little phalanx of "Independents" had done its duty and had purged the City of a most unwholesome influence.

Thus regarded, the Caucus must be condemned as a most discreditable movement. Of many of the men who engineered it, little else could have been expected. But there were some in that hetero-

geneous crowd which had ranged itself under Mr. Harrison's banner, who might have been expected to have better sense than to associate with a movement, which had for its avowed object the overthrow of a citizen of whom any country might be proud. That it had the support of people in high places only goes to prove the short-sightedness and ingrained prejudice of the rulers of the land. Men of sobriety of views, honesty of purpose and sterling worth are seldom regarded by them with friendly eyes, until the forces of extremism and violence rear their ugly heads, when all at once these Rip Wan Winkles wake up and realize that those upon whom they looked down with suspicion and hostility because of their independence and out-spokenness, are after all the strongest pillars of the State.

While, however, the attitude of officials high and low can be readily explained, it is not easy to understand how the movement could have received the support of Indians of position and abilities. It must be held to be in the nature of a reflection upon our national character that it was largely with the assistance of Pherozechah's own countrymen that the Caucus was able to achieve such a signal victory at the polls. A sad and disheartening thought indeed, were it not for the reflection that character and capacity are largely influenced by training and environments, and that a higher standard of public conduct can only come when the

people are entrusted with the responsibility of managing their own affairs. The Caucus forms one of the saddest chapters in the civic annals of Bombay. Never again, let us hope, will such a movement, so utterly contemptible in every phase of it, disfigure her proud and honourable record.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE SURAT CONGRESS AND AFTER.

1907.

THE tiny mite which saw the light of day in Bombay in 1885, after a period of healthy childhood, had now reached years of discretion. Year after year, the Congress had grown in strength and numbers, and had voiced the national aspirations with courage and faithfulness. Its annual gatherings brought together men of light and leading from every province—the intelligentsia of the nation—and focussed public opinion on the many problems of Indian administration. Like all non-official parliaments of the people, it harangued and declaimed, and passed an alarming number of resolutions with unfailing regularity. In spite, however, of a little oratorical exuberance and a fondness for spectacular effect, the Congress served a distinct purpose, and held a well-defined place in the political life of the country. It crystallized public opinion, which was finding expression day after day from a hundred platforms and in countless newspapers all over the country, and it roused the enthusiasm necessary for national progress as no other organization could hope to do.

During all these years of its growth to manhood, the Congress had trodden the path of constitutional agitation. The faith of its leaders was large in Time, and through obloquy, ridicule and disappointments they kept up a stout heart. Theirs was a voice crying in the wilderness, but they believed in their mission, and recognized that progress must be slow and that the ground must be fought inch by inch. They were content to work for the generations to come.

Towards the end of the century, came the Curzonian regime with its fetish of a soulless efficiency. In a fateful hour, the brilliant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, whose smartness was wont to delight the House of Commons, was sent out to succeed a mediocre and weak-kneed statesman. A singularly gifted man, he suffered from an exaggerated notion of himself and his mission in life. As Mr. A. G. Gardiner has observed, "Oxford was but a setting for one magical figure, Parliament the stage for one inimitable actor, India the background for one radiant form in purple and gold." He came full of a lofty purpose, his imagination fired at the idea of ruling three hundred millions of orientals. He brought with him a dozen "problems" in his pockets and set about his task with a fearful energy. His appetite grew with what it fed on, and the dozen problems multiplied. India, official and non-official, looked on, amazed and stupefied.

As the masterful Viceroy began to encounter opposition in his head-long career, his spirit became more and more intolerant, and he devised measure after measure to beat back the rising tide of nationalism. The culminating act of this restless one-man rule was reached in the ill-starred Partition of Bengal, "the biggest blunder since the Battle of Plassey." A measure professed to be in the interests of efficient administration, the Bengali people regarded it as striking at the root of their growing solidarity of feeling, and as calculated to overthrow the dominating political influence of the Bengali-speaking race. Never was there such an agitation as followed this hapless product of a misguided policy. It grew in strength and volume, and developed in a hundred different directions, until Royal sympathy and British statesmanship came to the rescue, and the "settled fact" was unsettled.

Side by side with the ferment produced by the events of an epoch-making Viceroyalty, there was a deep feeling of discontent among the more ardent spirits in the national movement, engendered by what they regarded as the utter futility of political agitation along the lines hitherto pursued. Year after year the cry of the Congress went unheeded, its ponderous resolutions were contemptuously cast aside as the demands of noisy agitators or impatient idealists. The new party would, therefore, have

nothing to do with the "policy of mendicancy" of the Congress and its veteran leaders. The Deccan and Bengal were the two principal centres of the new gospel that was preached from Press and platform by an ever-increasing band of youthful and aggressive politicians under the inspiration of men like Messrs. Bepin Chandra Pal, Arabindo Ghosh, and that stormy petrel of Indian politics, Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The first manifestations of the new spirit, so far as it affected the national movement embodied in the Congress, were evidenced at Benares in 1905, when Mr. Gokhale was in the chair. Anticipating trouble, he had wired to Mr. Setalvad, insisting upon Pherozeshah's presence at the session, as, without him there was a real danger of the Congress being committed to wild and impossible positions. Mr. Gokhale felt convinced that the proceedings would end harmoniously, and Pherozeshah's lead followed by an overwhelming majority if he was personally present. No serious injury was done to the Congress cause, however, in spite of Pherozeshah's keeping away, though it was felt by many that his presence would have completely frustrated the partly successful attempts which the New Party had made to drag the Congress at its heels.

In the following year at Calcutta, the breach widened, and the differences between the two wings of the Congress became more acute. An open

rupture was only prevented by the action of Pherozeshah, Gokhale and one or two other Moderate leaders in installing the Grand Old Man of India in the presidential chair. It was a happy inspiration. The presence of the venerable apostle of Indian nationalism, long past the patriarchal age, coming from the far-off land of his voluntary exile to render his last service to the people whom he loved so well, exercised a restraining influence on the noisiest Extremist, and prevented a definite split within the ranks. Even so, the bark of the Congress was driven in to perilous waters, and violent storms threatened to engulf it. The fight centred round the resolution about Boycott, though agreement on the other resolutions on Self-Government, Swadeshi and National Education was not reached without a bitter struggle between the two contending forces. The Bengali contingent aided by a section from Nagpur and the Deccan wanted to justify the use of Boycott as a political weapon, and to extend its operations to other provinces. The Moderate wing under the leadership of Pherozeshah, fought tooth and nail to prevent the good work of the Congress from being discredited by a resolution which breathed a spirit of vengeance and defiance, and they succeeded in whittling it down to an approval of Boycott as a measure of protest justified by the Partition of Bengal.

Stormy scenes marked the passage of the Boycott



resolution in the Subjects Committee. Pherozeshah and others were grossly insulted, and even the revered Dadabhai did not escape the shafts of Extremist invective. The wilder elements in the new party shouted and raved, and finally, headed by Mr. Bepin Chandra Pal and his lieutenant Mr. Khaparde, left the meeting in a body. The Congress was saved, however, and the much-debated resolutions were passed with some show of unanimity.

The gentle ways of the Extremist section excited considerable indignation and disgust in the older generation of Congressmen, who had nurtured the national movement in the face of obloquy, ridicule and indifference, and had not lost their faith in the ultimate triumph of their cause. The insult offered to Pherozeshah, whom the Extremists hated and feared as their most formidable opponent, was particularly resented by his political associates in every province, who had marched under his banner ever since his commanding talents marked him out as a leader of men. Mr. Bhupendranath Basu writing to Pherozeshah from Calcutta gave expression to the deep sense of humiliation, which was felt by him and many of his friends, at the rudeness displayed by some of the truculent young politicians of Bengal towards one who was "by common consent the leading statesman and politician in India." Such mani-

festations after 22 years of the Congress made him, he said, lose all faith in the future of their national life. Had the Congress been a failure in bringing them to a higher level and placing a nobler ideal before the people? Mr. Basu was aware that Pherozeshah with his unconquerable optimism and inspiring faith would deny the charge, for he had too stout a heart to be troubled by the contemptible manifestations of impotent malice and spite which were so much in evidence in Calcutta.

This feeling expression of regret from an old and valued colleague must have consoled Pherozeshah for any momentary annoyance he felt at the insolence and egregious folly of the youthful politicians who worshipped at the shrine of Mr. Tilak and Mr. Pal, and imbibed the political philosophy preached in the columns of *The Kesari* and *Bande Mataram*. He was too much of an optimist to be oppressed by the signs and portents of the new spirit, which was fast catching hold of the imagination of the younger generation. He saw the times that were coming through the persistent and contemptuous disregard of public opinion, which seemed to be the settled policy of the vast majority of those who ruled the country. Firm in his own principles, however, and convinced as he was of the utter futility of a gospel of violence, he resolved to fight the new doctrines with the same uncompromising vigour with which he had fought

oppression and injustice wherever he had met them. Other men shrank back, or coquetted with the new forces at work. Not so Pherozeshah, who strenuously endeavoured all along to keep the national movement in the paths of moderation and sanity, wherein alone he was convinced lay the salvation of his country. The role that he played in those momentous days, drew forth a tribute even from so unfriendly a critic of Indians as Sir Valentine Chirol :—\*

“ Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, a leading Parsee of Bombay, who had been drawn into co-operation with the Congress under the influence of the political Liberalism which he had heard expounded in England by Gladstone and Bright, played at this critical period an important part which deserves recognition. He was as eloquent as any Bengalee, and he possessed in a high degree the art of managing men. In politics he was as stout an opponent of Tilak’s violent methods as was Mr. Gokhale on social and religious questions, and he did, perhaps, more than anyone else to prevent the complete triumph of Tilakism in the Congress right down to the Surat upheaval.”

Immediately the Calcutta session was over, the apostles of the new cult started vigorous propa-

\**Indian Unrest*, p. 51.

ganda work throughout the country. Mr. Tilak opened the campaign at Allahabad in January, 1907, and he was shortly followed by his lieutenant Mr. Khaparde at Nagpur, where the ensuing Congress was to be held. The Moderate leaders were freely vilified by nationalist scribblers and orators, and were described as "the most debased of humankind." The work of preparation for the Congress at Nagpur was marked by the most disgraceful intrigues and scenes that ever disfigured the political annals of the country. Early in the year, when a meeting was held for the formation of the working committee, "a respected old C. P. leader of 60 years of age was greeted with a shoe, burning powder was sent in a letter to the president of the meeting, Dr. Gour, and threatening letters were sent to some other prominent men."

Amenities such as these were kept up throughout the months that followed. The Extremists wanted Mr. Tilak in the presidential chair, and they had resolved to stick at nothing to secure their object. The Moderates, though in a majority, were no match for their opponents, either in organizing skill or in methods of political warfare. The Reception Committee, however, which had the right of selecting the President by a three-fourths majority, according to a resolution of the Calcutta Congress, succeeded in electing Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh, an eminent Bengali lawyer and leader of thought, as

President of the Nagpur Session. This selection was in accord with the views of almost all the provincial centres consulted in the matter.

The Extremists foiled in their purpose, resolved upon creating confusion and chaos, and rendering the work of the Congress impossible. And they succeeded only too well. The Chairman of the Reception Committee, Mr. Chitnavis, was assailed with abuse, the minds of the ignorant and the illiterate were inflamed by all sorts of discreditable suggestions, and the student world was carefully educated into an attitude of violent hostility to the methods and policy of the older leaders. The inevitable result was that at a meeting of the Reception Committee held on the 22nd September, such scenes of hooliganism were enacted as destroyed all possibility of holding the Congress in the surcharged atmosphere of Nagpur. Efforts were made by Pherozeshah and other Bombay leaders to effect a compromise, but the politicians of the new school had a sliminess about them which defied all attempts at any definite settlement of the points at issue.

Finding that Nagpur was determined upon wrecking the Congress, Pherozeshah and his party reluctantly felt compelled to change the venue to some other place. At a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee held at his house, it was decided to transfer the sittings to Surat, which had

gallantly come forward to undertake the heavy responsibility of holding the Congress in her midst. The rage of the Extremists knew no bounds. Their newspapers and politicians showered unstinted abuse on the Moderate leaders, particularly Pheroze-shah, who was regarded as primarily responsible for the change of venue, and whose inflexible will and masterful personality they recognized as the greatest obstacle to the success of their manœuvres. Surat was jeered at as a "sleepy hollow," and all sorts of threats were held out to those responsible for the arrangements for the forthcoming session.

The good people of Surat rose valiantly to the occasion, however, and the work of preparing for the Congress proceeded briskly. It seemed for a time as if the tactical move of Pherozezeshah would prove an unqualified success, and the Congress would yet be saved. But the Moderates reckoned without their host. Mr. Tilak started the campaign at Surat with a denunciation of the change of venue, which was grossly misrepresented and this, as Mr. Gokhale stated, "without even the excuse of ignorance, since he was personally present at the meeting of the Committee, and knew exactly what had taken place." His next move was the commencement of an agitation to put up Lala Lajpatrai in place of Dr. Ghosh, whom the Surat Reception Committee had unanimously elected, and whose appointment was in all respects valid

and could not be challenged. This manœuvre was thwarted by the patriotic Lala himself, who declined to be disloyal to his erstwhile colleagues, and did not take the bait. The name of Mr. Aswini Kumar Dutt of Barisal fame was afterwards put forward. When it was found that this cry fell somewhat flat, another stunt was thought of by the ingenious politicians of the Deccan. About a week before the meeting of the Congress, the story was sedulously circulated that the Reception Committee had decided to jettison the decisions of the Calcutta Congress. The circumstance that the resolutions, which were entrusted to Mr. Gokhale to be drafted, were not forthcoming till the last day, was cleverly utilized for investing the rumour with an air of plausibility. It was in vain that personal assurances were given by Mr. Gokhale and others that the Reception Committee had no such intentions as were attributed to them,—an assurance which was superfluous in view of the fact that it was, after all, the Subjects Committee which was master of the situation. The draft resolutions, it may be added, were actually placed in the hands of Mr. Tilak a little before the Congress met. But he and his friends turned the blind eye to the telescope. They might well have thought, *Se non e vero, e ben trovato*.

The Extremist contingent arrived a couple of days before the appointed date, and entrenched

itself in a separate camp of its own. Its members came mostly from the Deccan, Berar and Bengal. According to the testimony of the late Mr. R. N. Mudholkar, one of the most respected of the old Congressmen, who lived to be appointed the first President of the Central Provinces Legislative Council, the delegates and visitors from Berar included gymnastic teachers, proclaimed touts, workmen from factories, fitters, oilmen *et hoc genus omne*. It was said that there were even some barbers from Nagpur! However that may be, it was apparent that the crowd which marched under the banner of Messrs. Tilak and Khaparde and their allies from Bengal, would not hesitate to employ stronger measures if everything else failed. They had come well primed, and their spirits were continually kept up by conferences at which Mr. Tilak and his lieutenants waxed indignant over what they described as the crooked ways and questionable tactics of their opponents. All this while, individual leaders on both sides carried on negotiations, which, however, led to nothing, for one of the two contending parties had not the slightest intention of settling the differences in a peaceful and constitutional manner.

At length the fateful 27th of December arrived. The Congress met in a *pandal* erected in the old



into a vast camp for the occasion. Over 1,600 delegates and 5,000 visitors were present. There was suppressed excitement in every face, and the scene was one of unusual animation :—

“The whole air was full of suspicion. The mere choice of Surat for the Congress after Nagpur was abandoned—how suspicious that was. Surat too close a neighbour to Bombay, the very stronghold of Bombay Moderates—Parsis, mere Parliamentarians, unredeemed by the fire of sacrifice, men who would make the best of both worlds, men who took titles from an alien Government ! It was in Surat that Sir Pherozeshah Mehta had founded his fortunes. Now he dominated all the West Coast, all the Presidency of Bombay, and here was seen with Mr. Dinshaw Edulji Wacha, most statistical of Parsis, himself President of the Calcutta Congress in 1901. All the other obedient satellites were circling round him too, bent on conciliating a government that answered conciliation with titles or contempt. Was a National Congress to be manipulated by mitred Parsis ? It was all very well to plead Sir Pherozeshah’s services to India in the past in the days when as a disciple of Ranade himself he had stood almost alone against the bureaucracy, had displayed a

courage equal to Mr. Gokhale's, an eloquence hardly second to Surendranath's, a power of sarcasm hardly rivalled by Moti Lal's ; had been chosen President for the young Congress in 1890 ; had conquered for Indians the control of the Bombay Corporation ; had converted his city into a model of local government ; had swept her slums and purged her administration. To the suspicious Nationalist, these things were nothing now. They belonged to the past, to the scrapheap of dead reputations. The crisis called for other arms, other methods."\*

It was a remarkable scene that met the visitor's eye. An air of restlessness, a feeling that something unusual was going to happen, seemed to pervade the vast assembly. Here and there some Extremist leader harangued little groups of men and kept alive the spirits of his audience. From time to time cheering broke out as some popular leader was sighted, the arrival of Lala Lajpatrai, in particular, arousing tremendous enthusiasm. At a little after 2-30, the President-elect arrived, accompanied by Messrs. Pherozeshah, Gokhale, Surendranath Bannerji and Tribhovandas Malvi, the Chairman of the Reception Committee, a respected citizen of Surat practising as a solicitor in Bombay. The drooping spirits of the Moderates revived as they

\*Mr. Novinson's *The New Spirit in India*, pp. 240-1.

saw the hearty welcome accorded to Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh. When everyone had taken his seat on the platform, on which one noticed among the men of light and leading from every province, Dr. Rutherford, one of the friends of India in Parliament, and Mr. Nevinson of the *Daily News*, some patriotic songs were sung, and at their conclusion Mr. Malvi delivered his address of welcome to the delegates. He was heard in comparative silence, occasionally interrupted by shouts of dissent when he pleaded for moderation.

As soon as he sat down, Diwan Bahadur Ambalal Sakarlal in a short speech formally proposed Dr. Ghosh to the chair. Mr. Surendranath Bannerji rose to second the proposition with that sonorous eloquence which once had delighted thousands of his countrymen. At the moment, however, the hero of a hundred platforms, stood discredited in the eyes of a certain section of his compatriots, who had fallen foul of him over the Midnapur Conference, and who despised him for the growing moderation of his views. Hardly had he opened his lips, when a section of the audience began to shout and create a disturbance which quickly grew into a violent tumult. Calls were made for Mr. Tilak and Lala Lajpatrai, and Mr. Bannerji was sought to be shouted down. The insult offered to the eminent leader of Bengal, roused the indignation of most of the delegates,

and half the audience were on their chairs shouting and howling execrations against the moving spirits of the disturbance.

At this stage, the distracted Chairman of the Reception Committee got upon the table, and declared that he would be obliged to suspend the sitting, if order were not speedily restored. Mr. Bannerji thereupon attempted to resume his speech from the elevated position which Mr. Malvi had occupied, but a regular pandemonium greeted his fresh effort. The audience got utterly out of hand. Excited individuals mounted the platform, scrambling across the chairs in the way, and offered to eject the rowdies by force. At 3-30 the meeting was suspended, and the leaders from the various provinces considered the position for a while. Mr. Nevinson offered to address the meeting if it were likely to still the clamour, but it was thought too late to have any effect. Mr. Bannerji made a further attempt to speak, but the only result was renewed obstruction, and the meeting had to be abandoned for the day.

After the suspension of the Congress, an infuriated crowd of delegates and visitors followed Mr. Tilak and shouted "Traitor! Traitor!" There was considerable excitement everywhere, and peaceful Surat presented an unusually animated appearance. Late in the evening, a manifesto was issued over the signatures of about twenty of the

leading Congressmen in all parts of the country, appealing for orderly behaviour, and pointing out the humiliation of the situation and the disgrace it would bring to the country if the sitting of the Congress had to be altogether abandoned. Many among the sane and sober elements in the Congress were hopeful that the appeal would not fall on deaf ears, and till late in the night efforts were made to ensure the smooth conduct of the proceedings on the ensuing day.

At 1 p. m. on the 27th December, the Congress met again. As the President-elect was marching up to the *dais*, he was accorded an enthusiastic welcome by the vast majority of those present, which put heart into his supporters, and greatly restored their confidence. While the procession was entering, a small slip of paper was put in the hands of Mr. Malvi. It stated :—

“Sir,—I wish to address the delegates on the proposal of the election of the President after it is seconded. I wish to move an adjournment with a constructive proposal. Please announce me.

Yours sincerely,

B. G. Tilak,

Deccan Delegate (Poona).”

The Chairman hurriedly read this ominous message, and put the slip in his pocket. The

proceedings were resumed at the point at which they had been interrupted, and Mr. Bannerji was quietly allowed to finish his speech, the Poona and Nagpur Extremists listening in sullen silence. Pandit Motilal Nehru having duly supported the motion, the Chairman put it to the vote, and an overwhelming majority having shouted their assent, the motion was declared to have been carried. Dr. Ghosh thereupon took the chair amidst loud and prolonged cheering from his supporters in all parts of the *pandal*. As he rose to deliver his address, up went Mr. Tilak on the platform, stood in front of the President, and demanded to be heard, as he had given notice of an amendment. The Chairman of the Reception Committee pointed out that he could neither ask for an adjournment of the Congress at that stage, nor move an amendment to the election of the President, which had been duly made. Mr. Tilak thereupon began to argue with Dr. Ghosh, who explained to him that he was out of order. Mr. Tilak refused to submit to the ruling, however, and declared he would appeal to the delegates.

While this argument was taking place on the platform, the audience was already in a tumult. The rank and file of the Extremists were repeating their performance of the day before, and the rest of the audience was hurling imprecations on them and their leader. The unfortunate President tried

to ignore the tempestuous scenes occurring before him, and made valiant attempts to be heard above the din and tumult, and repeatedly appealed to Mr. Tilak, who was all the while loudly insisting on his right to move the amendment, to resume his seat. Dr. Rutherford and several others endorsed the appeal. But the Extremist leader just folded his arms on his chest, and declined to go back unless he was bodily removed. It was with difficulty that the Moderate leaders could dissuade their exasperated following from forcibly laying hands on Mr. Tilak and chucking him out.

Matters were now assuming an ugly aspect. The well-disciplined ranks of Poona and Nagpur with the *lathis* in their hands, with which they had thoughtfully provided themselves, were making a rush at the platform. The President realized the hopelessness of the situation, and appealed for the last time to the determined man with the folded hands who would not be denied a hearing. But the appeal went unheeded. At this moment a Deccani shoe was hurled from the audience on to the platform, and grazing the Bengali hero fallen from grace, struck Pherozeshah on the face. Pandemonium ensued ; chairs were thrown at the *dais*, sticks were freely used, and more than one man on the platform was roughly handled. Pherozeshah seemed to excite in a particular degree the wrath of the hooligans, many of whom

were supposed to be educated men. In the tumult, some of the Nagpur contingent rushed at him shouting, "We want to punish these Parsee rascals." The scene may be described in the language of Mr. Nevinson, who was present throughout, a keenly-interested spectator :—

"Suddenly something flew through the air. A shoe!—a Mahratta shoe!—reddish leather, pointed toe, sole studded with lead. It struck Surendranath Bannerji on the cheek; it cannoned off upon Sir Pheroze-shah Mehta. It flew, it fell, and as at a given signal, white waves of turbaned men surged up the escarpment of the platform. Leaping, climbing, hissing the breath of fury, brandishing long sticks, they came, striking at any head that looked to them Moderate, and in another moment, between brown legs standing upon the green-baize table, I caught glimpses of the Indian National Congress dissolving in chaos."

There was no help for it now but to suspend the Congress *sine die*, which the President did amidst scenes of indescribable confusion. The ladies in the audience were hastily taken away to a place of safety. Mr. Tilak was borne off by his followers. Pherozechah, Gokhale and others were escorted out of the place by a back entrance. Free fighting



continued to rage in the *pandal*, however, and the police had ultimately to come in, and clear the meeting.

It was an unforgettable, and to most of the old leaders, an unnerving experience. In the tent outside, to which a hurried advance had to be made, they stood, flushed and angry, and unable to think clearly of the situation that had arisen. Poor sensitive Gokhale trembled with excitement and indignation. Almost alone among the old leaders, Pherozechah walked about calm and unmoved. Not all the execrations and calumnies directed against him for months past, not even that Deccani shoe were able to impair the robust confidence of the man, or affect his clarity of vision or political judgment. Interviewed shortly afterwards, he smiled and said he knew it was coming very soon, and that he was inclined to regard it as a blessing in disguise. The Congress would emerge stronger and healthier from the ordeal, and would not be dragged at the heels of the noisy politicians, who threatened to destroy its reputation for moderation and sanity. The separation was inevitable, unless the Congress was to submit itself to the rule of the Extremists. He was very glad the Moderates had managed to avoid the grand mistake of using force against Mr. Tilak, and had thus placed the onus of the split on him.

The proceedings at Surat were commented upon

at length by most of the London Papers. *The Daily News* hoped that the fiasco might do good, and declared that the failure of the Moderates was due to the slow pace and grudging scope of reforms in the administration. True to its great traditions, it urged the adoption of a policy of restoring faith in British wisdom and justice. *The Tribune*, the newly-founded organ of Liberalism, was of opinion that the conduct of the Extremists would effect a reaction favourable to the constitutional side of the national movement. On the other hand, *The Standard* thought the events at Surat would convince people, that the Congress, when not actively mischievous, was the exact representation of what an Indian National Parliament would be, viz., a political bear-garden.

On the evening of the memorable day, which saw the break-up of the session, a large number of leading delegates met in Pherozezshah's quarters to consider what steps should be taken to continue the work of the Congress. It was resolved to hold a Convention the next day of all those delegates to the Congress, who were agreed that the attainment by India of self-government similar to that enjoyed by the self-governing members of the British Empire was the goal of Indian aspirations, that the advance towards this goal was to be by strictly constitutional means, and that all meetings held for the promotion of

these aims and objects were to be conducted in an orderly manner with due submission to the authority of those who were entrusted with the power to control their procedure. A manifesto was accordingly issued over the signatures of Messrs. Rash Behari Ghosh, Pherozeshah, Surendranath Bannerji, Gokhale, Wacha, Madan Mohun Malaviya and most of the leading men from the various provinces assembled in Surat.

The Convention was held on the 28th December in the *pandal*, where two days before *lathis* and shoes and broken chairs had been freely flying about. The delegates to the Convention were required to sign a declaration before tickets were issued to them for admission. For further precaution, volunteers were posted at the gates, who excluded known agitators without offering them an opportunity of signing the declaration. An ample force of police was in guard at the place, ready for any pleasant surprises which the Poona and Nagpur gentry might spring upon the gathering.

In moving the election of Dr. Ghosh to the chair, Pherozeshah observed that he had once spoken from the Congress platform of an unconventional Convention for the purpose of promoting the interests of the country. He did not think then that in process of time, they would have to meet in the form of a Convention, for the purpose of resuscitating the work which had gone on for

23 years with the co-operation of all the provinces. The motion was seconded by Mr. Surendranath Bannerji, and supported by Lala Lajpatrai. There was only one resolution on the agenda paper, and it was moved by Mr. Gokhale. It declared that the object of the Convention consisted chiefly in the first two articles of the Declaration already signed by the delegates, and in reviving the Congress in accordance with its terms. A committee was appointed to draft a constitution. It may be mentioned in passing that it met at Allahabad in April, 1908, settled the constitution, and passed a set of rules for the conduct and regulation of Congress meetings. The creed of the Congress so settled was to be subscribed to unconditionally by every delegate.

Thus ended the first chapter in the history of the Indian National Congress. On an impartial consideration of all the facts and arguments bearing on the subject, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that the wreck of the session at Surat was carefully planned and deliberately carried out. A telegram had been received from the Extremist headquarters at Calcutta which said, "Blow up, if everything else fails," and every manœuvre in the game shows how the mandate was carried out. The Extremists published their version of the affair shortly after the break-up of the Congress. On a comparison of it with the account

issued by the officials of the Congress, the statement published by Mr. Gokhale, and the testimony of many impartial observers, one is sorrowfully led to conclude that the Extremist manifesto 'handles the truth very careless.'

The part that Mr. Tilak played at this supreme juncture in our political history was unworthy of a man, who, despite certain incidents in his stormy career which it is impossible to regard with approbation, may be said to have rendered notable services to the national cause, and whose sufferings and trials endeared him to millions of his countrymen. It is true that differences of outlook and methods between the two parties made an early rupture inevitable. The Extremists had charted the seas and mapped out the course they were determined to pursue. The Moderates were equally determined to go along the path they had trodden with a dogged perseverance for many a year. At their head, supported by Gokhale and a band of able and loyal adherents, stood Pherozeshah, with his great skill in the handling of men, his unrivalled powers of debate and his unbending will in matters of principle. Such a dreaded opponent could neither be converted nor crushed. Small hope, therefore, that the two parties could have evolved a common programme, or stood for long on a common platform. But the fight at Surat was

not the natural outcome of a clash of principles. It was a piece of organized hooliganism, which brought a measure of discredit upon the national movement, which clung to it for years. It also infused a bitterness into the political life of India, which had a baleful effect on the course of events during the memorable days which followed. That was the principal achievement of the Surat Congress.

When the Extremists contemplated their handiwork on the morrow of that eventful session, it was to be overwhelmed with a feeling that a cardinal blunder had been committed. In the euphymistic language of Mr. Khaparde, "regret at the occurrences, irrespective of the causes that led to them, appeared to be universal, coupled with a desire that a *modus operandi* should be found to bring all concerned together, and arrange for an adjustment, honourable to all alike and calculated to further the cause of the Congress." The Nationalist party clearly saw that in wrecking the Congress, it had lost a powerful weapon for the furtherance of its political purposes, and it was anxious to repair the tactical mistake it had committed. Its first move was the appointment of a Congress Continuation Committee to revive the suspended session. These attempts at *rapprochement* were repeated at several provincial conferences. But the Moderates did not readily take

the bait. The more discerning among their leaders realized the utter 'incompatibility of temperament,' and desired a complete divorce.

Their opponents, however, did not lose heart. They carried on a vigorous campaign in favour of a united Congress, and strove hard to show that the differences between the two parties were not irreconcilable. With their usual ingenuity, they set about proving the ultimate identity of aims and interests of both sections, and explaining away the points of cleavage. And they achieved a certain measure of success. Many among the ranks of the Moderate party felt inclined to listen to the soothing strains which emanated from the Nationalist organs. They forgot the injury which had been done to the cause, and the insults to which they had been subjected, and were anxious to discover a common programme of action.

It was at this moment, when a mood of doubt and hesitancy was seizing even the sober and the thoughtful that Mr. Bhupendranath Basu wrote to Pherozeshah asking for an expression of his views on the proposed re-union of the parties. The reply was in the nature of a bomb-shell thrown in the camp of the Extremists. It was a crushing exposure of all the fallacies, misrepresentations and disingenuous arguments which were clouding the real issue, and was an inspiring call to the timid and the wavering to stand fast

by their convictions. It started with a defence of the Creed of the Congress, which had been attacked in various quarters:—

“The events which took place in Nagpur and Surat, and the circumstances under which the Congress broke up in Surat make it now absolutely essential that the unwritten law on which the Congress was based from the very commencement, namely, that it was to be a legal and constitutional movement carried on by our organization which loyally accepted British rule, should be now put in express words, at once clear and unambiguous, unassailable by any such dialectical chicanery as was practised in the last Congress on the Boycott resolution, when the words agreed to as meaning one thing were attempted to be explained into another and a very different thing. It is no use shutting one's eyes to the fact within our own knowledge, (I can speak with authority as regards so-called Extremist leaders in the Bombay Presidency) that some secretly cherish the idea of using the Congress for aims and methods not altogether constitutional. It is impossible, therefore, to let any doubt exist as to the character of the Congress organization and movement.”



The letter next referred to the question of the much-debated Calcutta Resolutions, the innocent cause of all the woes of the Surat Congress. It was the little game of the party headed by Messrs. Tilak and Bepin Chandra Pal to pretend all along that these resolutions were in danger, and that the Moderates cherished the dark design of getting out of them at the earliest possible opportunity. They kept the cry up, with a cheerful disregard of the facts, even after the Surat split, and they were now demanding guarantees from prominent Congressmen that these resolutions should form the inalienable planks of the Congress platform. Referring to this, Pherozeshah observed that he could not conceive anything more monstrous and impudent than the demand in that behalf. The least examination of it betrayed its disingenuous character. It was an attempt to stop the Subjects Committee and the full Congress from discussing and deliberating on every subject that might be regularly brought before them, and deciding it according to their judgment. If, as was alleged, there was a majority in favour of the Calcutta Resolutions, surely that majority could carry them, both through the Subjects Committee and the Congress. If it was otherwise, such an agreement as was demanded was a monstrous attempt to impose the will of the minority on the majority.

Pherozeshah next dealt with the plea for a

united Congress with characteristic courage and outspokenness. Said he :—

“I cannot help saying that there is a great deal of mawkish sentimentality in the passionate appeals for union at all cost. For my part, I think it is most desirable that each sets of distinct convictions should have their separate Congresses. To jumble them up in one body confuses the real understanding of the extent to which opinion really tends in one direction or another, and it is not possible to make out what are the dimensions of the cleavage and difference of opinion existing on any particular question. It is, therefore, desirable that persons holding nearly the same opinions and principles should organize themselves into bodies where they can expound them, and lay them before the public in a clear and consistent form. The public could then have the issues clearly before them, and their deliberate judgment can declare itself by the growing favour they would accord to any particular association. For God’s sake, let us have done with all inane and slobbery whine about unity where there is really none. Let each consistent body of views and principles have its own Congress in an

honest and straightforward way, and let God, *i.e.*, truth and wisdom judge between us all."

The letter was widely published, and was the topic of the hour everywhere. Sober politicians throughout the country admired its manly tone and its strong common-sense. In equal measure, it received the condemnation of Extremist politicians, who were furious at what was undoubtedly a knock-out blow, which was calculated to put an end to their little campaign. "Choice epithets of cultured Billingsgate," was the comment of one of their organs on the offending letter. The feeling in Bengal was particularly bitter. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, which was never enamoured of Pherozeshah's politics, condemned the letter in unequivocal terms. Even the friendly *Bengalee* was constrained to record a protest:—

"Sir Pherozeshah Mehta has described the desire for a United Congress as a mawkish sentimentality. We regret that he should have used this language in relation to a wide-spread and deep-seated sentiment which inspires the political world of Bengal. We regret it all the more, as coming from one who has numerous friends in Bengal and whose tact and judgment in dealing with delicate public questions is so well known. Bengal feels that a Sectional Con-

gress is not a National Congress, and that a Sectional Congress has no right to speak in the name of the nation. If the Non-Conventionalists are willing to accept the Creed, and fight under the constitutional standard for the attainment of a goal which is perfectly constitutional, their exclusion from the Congress would be unjustifiable, and there is no reason why their legitimate demands should not be sympathetically considered. The spirit which we condemn in the Government is not the spirit that we should foster in the bosom of the Congress. Sir Pheroza Shah Mehta's language is strong, unconciliatory and, we are constrained to say, too masterful to suit the democratic temper of those who have been brought up amid the traditions of the Congress and the free public life of our province. But this is only a matter of style about which the writer must please himself."

There was another class of critics who read into the letter a confession of active disunion among the politically-minded classes in India, and advised the Moderates to tear themselves away from a movement which had ceased to be useful and national. *The Bombay Gazette* observed that the Congress was doomed as a representative institution, and the sooner true and honest Moderates

washed their hands of it, the better. *The Times of India* wrote that courage in Indian politics was rare, and surgical operations always painful ; but it was convinced that the Congress would gain in power and influence if it had the courage to amputate the accretion, viz., the Extremists, and if it carried on the work ready to its hand without fashing about the distant goal of colonial self-government, which was likely to form a weapon in the hands of the men who wrecked the Surat session, and who would rejoin the organization, signing every and any declaration only that they might divert the Congress from its old constitutional paths to their own methods of agitation.

As a result of the courageous stand taken by Pherozechah, and in which he was supported by most of his old colleagues, the Congress which met at Madras in the following year under the presidentship of Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh, was able to keep out the Extremists, who were so anxious to regain their foothold. As the President in his address put it, their paths now lay wide apart, and a yawning gulf separated them. The Congress was ready to take the wayward wanderers back, but it could not and dared not extend the hand of fellowship to them, so long as they persisted in their present policy.

It is necessary at this point to anticipate matters a little, and to follow the fortunes of the Con-

gress somewhat further on its onward journey. The Madras session had proved a success, and falsified the gloomy forebodings of hostile critics. The struggle was not at an end, however, and there were many in the camp of the Moderates, who were anxious to close up the ranks, and sighed for a United Congress. The next session was to be held at Lahore, and it was expected that a concerted opposition would be offered to the newly-framed constitution. A strong President was required under the circumstances, and the choice of the Provincial Congress Committees almost unanimously fell on Pherozeshah. The only dissentient voice was that of Bengal, which, more than any other province desired a *rapprochement*, and which did not relish the idea of having at the helm a resolute man who knew his own mind and had his own way of dealing with timidity and vacillation. At the Bengal Provincial Conference held at Hooghly in August, 1910, the leaders of both sections had taken part, and attempted to prepare the ground for a United Congress. The election of Pherozeshah by the Reception Committee in accordance with the votes of the Provincial Committees was, therefore, unpopular with Bengali politicians generally, as also with a few people in Lahore itself. There was every indication that the approaching session would be far from peaceful.

Matters were in this state, when one fine morning, just a fortnight before the due date, the country was startled by the news that Pherozeshah had suddenly resigned the Presidentship of the Congress. The telegram which conveyed the decision to Lala Harkishan Lal, Chairman of the Reception Committee, was as brief as it was enigmatic.

“I deeply regret that owing to a combination of unexpected circumstances, I am compelled to relinquish the honour.”

The country was bewildered. Not even the closest friends of Pherozeshah suspected his intentions, or could guess at the reasons which prompted this extraordinary step, which threw the Congress into utter confusion. The President elect was as silent and mysterious as the Sphinx. The air became thick with rumours and surmises. Some said that Pherozeshah had lost faith in his former political followers and associates, and did not care again to run the risk of insult and molestation. Others concluded that “the deep political reasons supposed to underlie his action had no better foundation than a meticulous reluctance to preside over a Congress that bade fair to be either a frost or a riot.” Yet others declared that while Pherozeshah was well aware of the strong feeling against him in certain circles, he accepted the Presidentship in the anticipation that the opposition would gradually evaporate in face of the settled

fact. Finding that this was not the case, and that in fact only a very few days before, criticism had been strongly expressed, with characteristic impulsiveness he had suddenly decided to resign rather than occupy a position, his fitness for which was not acquiesced in by all parties. The Bombay correspondent of *The Capital* more charitable than others, declared that the Extremists would have turned the Congress at Lahore into a pandemonium if Pherozeshah had pronounced *ex cathedra* the views he had expressed in his famous letter, and it was to save the country an unseemly exhibition at a time when the reformed Councils had ushered in a new era which called for co-operation and good-will, that the great patriot had declined to go to Lahore.

Whatever the reasons, it is impossible not to criticize an action which dealt, what appeared to be for the time being at least, a shattering blow to the Congress cause. Though the 'silver-tongued orator' of Allahabad, Pandit Madan Mohun Malaviya, gallantly stepped into the breach, and cheerfully responded to an eleventh-hour call, in spite of indifferent health, a chilling atmosphere pervaded Bradlaugh Hall, and damped the ardour of the somewhat thin assembly which had gathered to voice the nation's demands. A cloud seemed to hang over the session, and impart a feeling of general depression. For this result, the sudden and unusual step taken



by Pherozeshah was largely responsible. In the words of a journal which had invariably fought under his banner, "the pilot whom the country had trusted as the fittest man to steer the barque to haven when gathering clouds betokened a tempest, suddenly abandoned his post, and left the ship to drift as it might over the troubled waters."

A stout and fearless fighter, the act was strangely inconsistent with the whole record of his life. From the day he had stood up bravely, while a very young man, in defence of the Crawford régime, against a host of hostile critics, he had never paltered with his convictions, or run away from a fight because the odds were against him, and it is hardly possible that on the present occasion he shrank from fear. But whatever the motives operating on his mind, it cannot be gainsaid that his decision was as unwise as it was unfortunate. There were trouble and unrest in the land, a wave of discontent was sweeping over the country, anarchism had reared its ugly head, and its bloody trail was steadily lengthening. The voice of reason and moderation had been silenced. In the counsels of Government, reactionary influences were at work, and repression was rampant, growing with the growth of the new forces that had arisen. Not even the Reforms seemed able to stem the tide of sedition and anarchy and the repressive legislation they brought in their train. In this moment-

ous hour of her destiny, all India was on the tiptoe of expectation as to what her great leader had to say on the burning questions of the day. She was waiting for a lead, for some weighty pronouncement on the attitude both of the Government and the people. But the lead was never given, and the man best fitted to sound the note of reason and true statesmanship, and to inspire the country with his own robust optimism, and his abiding faith in peaceful and ordered progress, with a masterful gesture retreated into the background, and left his following wondering and helpless.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE POLICE CHARGES ACT—THE MORLEY-MINTO REFORMS.

1907-1909.

IT was an apt commentary on the aims and methods of the Caucus that the man whom it attempted to dethrone was able shortly afterwards to render a signal service to the Corporation, where his predominance had been regarded as mischievous by the puny men who resented it. In September, 1907, the Police Charges Act was passed, and the curtain fell upon a drama which had dragged its weary length for nearly forty years. Thanks to the conciliatory spirit shown by Lord Lamington's Government, and the skilful handling of the Corporation by Pherozeshah, the long-standing dispute between the two bodies as to the apportionment of the charges for education, medical relief and the police was brought to a happy conclusion. All throughout the protracted and bitter struggle, Pherozeshah had played a notable part, and it was no small satisfaction to him that he was instrumental in bringing about a settlement satisfactory to both parties. It was,

perhaps, the most outstanding achievement of his municipal career, and one upon which he could look back with legitimate pride.

By the Act of 1865, the whole cost of maintenance of the police force in Bombay was charged on the municipal fund. There was a somewhat vague proviso by which a proportion of the cost was to be borne by Government under certain conditions. This was the subject of constant wrangling between the two bodies, and the Corporation more than once had to appeal to the Government of India and the Secretary of State against the decisions of the local Government. In 1882, came the memorable resolution on local self-government with which the name of Lord Ripon will always be imperishably associated. It laid down that municipal bodies should be relieved altogether of the charges for the police over whom they practically exercised no control, and that an equal amount of expenditure on education and medical relief should be transferred to them with as full control as might be expedient over the details of such expenditure. If this principle had been loyally accepted and promptly given effect to, the relations between the Government and the Corporation would not have been strained to breaking point, as they so often were. But the manner in which it was to be put into operation was the subject of acute differences, and the frequent negotia-

tions which took place between the Government and the Corporation led to no satisfactory settlement.

The Act of 1888 failed to strike out a definite line of policy, and by providing that a certain proportion of the charges of the police was to be borne by the Municipality, kept alive a constant source of friction. No clear-cut agreement could be reached as to what exactly were the liabilities of the Corporation by virtue of this provision. It led to disputes about various items of expenditure incurred in connection with the maintenance of the police. Memorials were submitted by the Corporation from time to time, most of them drafted by Pherozeshah, who, also in his Budget speeches before the Council, constantly reminded the Government of the unfairness of many of the charges debited to the municipal exchequer. When a committee was appointed by Government in 1893, to report upon the proposals of the Commissioner of Police for an increase in the force which the experiences gained during the Hindu-Mohamedan riots of that year had indicated as necessary, Pherozeshah, as the representative of the Corporation, took up a strong attitude, and insisted on being given an ample opportunity of scrutinizing the recommendations before them. When that was denied to him, he refused to sign the report, and submitted to the Corporation a

scathing indictment of the methods and procedure of the Committee, which led to a lively encounter with its Secretary, Mr. James Campbell, a Civilian of notoriously reactionary views.

Such was the spirit of the relations between the Government and the Corporation on the question of the police charges. The differences on this subject affected the settlement of the policy with regard to education and medical relief, which also, as we have seen, was a fruitful cause of friction. Lord Lamington's Government were anxious to put a stop to these never-ending disputes, and to meet the wishes of the Corporation with respect to the transfer of liabilities. They, therefore, proposed to hand over to the Corporation the liability in respect of primary education and medical relief, and to relieve that body altogether of the police charges against which it had so long been clamouring.

The Corporation under the guidance of Pheroza Shah accorded its general approval to these proposals. "The settlement of the Police charges is safe if you can manage the Corporation," Sir Steyning Edgerley wrote to Pheroza Shah; and the Caucus-ridden Corporation had been managed after all. But there were several objectionable features which had to be re-cast in order to make the scheme altogether acceptable. These were the subject of discussions between the leaders of the opposing

forces, and a satisfactory arrangement was at length arrived at. Sir Steyning Edgerley was a foeman worthy of his steel and it was no easy task for Pherozeshah to secure a complete understanding on the various points at issue. His knowledge of all the intricate bearings of the question was unequalled, and, as a local newspaper put it, "when the issue passed from polemics to compromise Sir Pherozeshah faced the situation in a broad and statesman-like spirit which powerfully aided a decision." The conspicuous part he played in bringing about a settlement was cordially recognized both in the Council and the Corporation.

The Bill was introduced in the Council in July, 1907, and passed into law two months later. It was characterized by Pherozeshah as a "Bill to settle the differences between the Corporation and the Government." It did away with a constant source of friction between the two bodies, and as such was welcomed by all parties. The Corporation in the result has not gained financially by the arrangement in view of its daily growing liabilities with regard to primary education and medical relief. But, as Pherozeshah observed at the second reading of the Bill, when exchanges of this sort are effected, it is always difficult to say who will be the ultimate gainer, because the respective duties and functions are capable of indefinite extension and development. For one thing, the

Corporation got by the Act full control over services which must be regarded as primarily municipal, and was rid of the obnoxious police charges which it resented, inasmuch as it had to pay the piper, while the Government called for the tune. Above all, the settlement of this much-vexed question paved the way for a better understanding between the Corporation and the Government, so essential for the real progress of municipal administration. The Act may, therefore, be legitimately regarded as a notable example of peace by negotiation—‘a striking illustration of Lord Rosebery’s faith in two men meeting at an inn’—and as one of the most constructive achievements of Pherozeshah’s long and splendid career.

## II.

The tide of Liberalism which set in in the closing months of 1905 synchronized with the departure of Lord Curzon from India, and raised high the hopes of Indian reformers. It was an article of faith with Pherozeshah that the salvation of India lay with the Liberals, and he was never tired of emphasizing this point of view. Among the few who shared this opinion was Sir William Wedderburn, who on the morrow of the General Election, which resulted in the triumphant return of the great Party



after ten years of wandering in the wilderness, had written to Pherozeshah pointing out the unique opportunity which had presented itself to India, through the return to Parliament of so many of her best friends, and through the presence for the first time of a large Labour element. Above everything else, a rare stroke of imagination had sent 'Honest John' to Whitehall and all India had hailed the appointment with enthusiasm. If the footsteps of that philosophic Radical were tactfully guided as between the bureaucracy on the one hand and the Extremist party on the other, Indian politicians were sanguine of seeing an early fulfilment of their cherished hopes and aspirations. Sir William was, therefore, anxious that Pherozeshah and other leading Indians should go over "to instruct and influence the Members of Parliament." Advancing age and indifferent health, however, precluded the idea of Pherozeshah undertaking any such task. By habits and temperament, he was not fitted for active propaganda work of any sort. His strength lay in the art of managing men and in the faculty of guiding and controlling popular movements. As he grew older, his contact with the currents of national life became less intimate, and his interests were more and more confined to the city of his birth, where he reigned supreme till the end of his days.

The proud privilege of actively serving India at

what promised to be the threshold of a new era, was accorded, therefore, to a younger man, worthy in every way of shouldering the great responsibility. It was fortunate, indeed, for the country that it had at this juncture a politician of Mr. Gokhale's fine character and virile intellect to voice her aspirations and grievances before the British public. There was none in all India more fitted for the task. A good deal of spade work had already been done, but no definite shape had yet been given to the full national demands. When Mr. Gokhale returned from his first mission to England on the eve of the General Election in 1905, Sir William Wedderburn, Sir Henry Cotton, Mr. Herbert Roberts and others had asked him to get a Bill prepared in India for the further reform of the Legislative Councils, and to bring it with him on the occasion of his second visit. The Bombay Congress of 1904 had asked for the right to divide the Councils on financial matters as the next instalment of reform, and in the Bill which was proposed to be drafted this was to be definitely included, as also a demand for an increase in the number of elected members. Mr. Gokhale was anxious that Pherozeshah should draft the Bill, or in any event, revise it before it could be taken to England.

While these preparations were going on, the Government of India were not idle. Soon after his arrival in August, 1906, Lord Minto took the

initiative and appointed a small committee of his Council to consider among other matters the increase of the representative element in the Indian and Provincial Legislative Councils. He recognized the vast changes that had taken place in the world-situation :—

“ All Asia was marvelling at the victories of Japan over a European power. Their effects were far-reaching. New possibilities seemed to spring into existence, there were indications of a popular demand in China, in Persia, in Egypt and in Turkey. There was an awakening of the Eastern world, and though to outward appearances, India was quiet, in the sense that there was at the moment no visible acute political agitation, she had not escaped the general infection. ”

Lord Minto was above all things anxious that the Government of India should not be put in the position of appearing to have their hands forced by agitation in this country or by pressure from Home, and he bent himself to the task with energy and good will. In due course, the reform proposals of the Government were published. They were found to have been conceived in a narrow spirit, and there was little in them of that spacious statesmanship which people associated with the name of John Morley. The position in India was becoming one of great difficulty. The forces of

unrest and anarchism had grown in strength and violence, and brought in their train repressive legislation such as the country had never known. Among other measures, a Press Act was passed, introduced in the Council by the then Law Member, Sir S. P. Sinha, not yet on the highest rung of his remarkable political career, and warmly supported by Mr. Gokhale and the majority of his non-official colleagues. It is interesting to note, in passing, that on Mr. Gokhale's return to Bombay after the close of the session at which the Act was passed, Pherozeshah expressed strong disapproval of his attitude towards the measure. On Mr. Gokhale pleading helplessness in face of the evidence produced by Government of the seditious character of many of the writings in the Indian Press, Pherozeshah replied with some vehemence that the non-official members had no business to support it even in spite of the plea of necessity. Government had never listened to the advice of the leaders of the people on matters of policy, and when it came to forging repressive legislation, they wanted the latter to share the responsibility and the odium. It was a great mistake, therefore, on the part of the Indian members of the Council to support the Press Act. They ought rather to have asked Government to go into the root causes of the violent propaganda preached in many of the Indian papers. Mr. Gokhale listened in silence, feeling, perhaps, that

his leader was taking an extreme attitude. Little did he realize that the weapon he had helped to forge would be used for the purpose of terrorising innocent and guilty alike and produce a feeling of bitter resentment, and that in this as in so many other instances, Time would vindicate in a striking manner the soundness of Pherozeshah's judgment.

To resume our story of the events that led up to the Reforms, people were losing their faith in a Secretary of State who had imbibed his political philosophy from some of the greatest minds of the age, but who did not seem to differ very greatly in his methods from a sun-dried bureaucrat. The 'anger of the impatient idealist' did not appear, however, to move the philosophic Radical. It was a time for sober counsel, and for the exercise of 'the faith which removes mountains.' In an admirable article contributed to the columns of *India*, Sir William Wedderburn pleaded for patience and forbearance. As Mr. Morley observed in a letter to him, it was "the first frank plea for giving me a chance that has yet come from the camp of the reformers either there or here." But with repression on one side, and a much-diluted dose of reforms on the other, the voice of reason had not much chance of being heard.

The original proposals were subjected to a great deal of useful and intelligent criticism. The Bombay Presidency Association sent in February, 1908,

a very weighty and dignified representation drafted by Pherozeshah himself, analysing in a masterly way some of the reactionary features of the scheme before the country, *viz.*, the creation of Advisory Councils, the narrowness of the franchise in the Legislative Councils, the maintenance of official majorities and the denial of any share in the executive government of the country. If the Government of India really wanted to know the better mind of the country, they had ample material in this as well as numbers of other representations which reached them from all parts of the country. At the other end, the Secretary of State put himself in constant touch with the best exponents of the Indian point of view. The indefatigable Gokhale, the sagacious Wedderburn, and that noble statesman who was the first to breathe into India the impulse of freedom, the venerable Lord Ripon, were always at his elbow. Mr. Morley himself, though cautious and conservative at times, was resolute and masterful, and faithful to those great principles which have made him one of the most inspiring figures in the political life of our time.

With such forces at work, the Morley-Minto scheme ultimately took shape as a liberal measure of reform calculated to conciliate the large body of responsible politicians in India. It succeeded in rallying the Moderates to the support of the Government, as its distinguished authors were anxious

it should. A representative of *The Times of India* interviewed Pherozechah on the 18th December, 1908, and asked him for his views on the scheme. The latter declared it was a very genuine effort, and he was more than pleased. It bore out what he had always maintained, namely, that any substantial step in reforming the constitutional machinery could only come from the Liberal Party. He found it difficult to conceive that any Conservative Government could have designed a measure of so liberal a character. The reforms proposed were really substantial. The enlargement of the Councils was a long step in advance, but he was convinced it would be justified by the results. It would succeed in bringing the people into close touch with the everyday administration. There was one point, however, on which he wanted, not so much to sound a discordant note, as to combat a delusion which he found largely entertained. Referring to the Secretary of State's dictum that for many a day to come self-government for India was a mere dream, Pherozechah observed :—

“ With his usual caution Lord Morley has remarked that the Parliamentary system in India was a goal to which he did not aspire. I venture to think that this might have been left unsaid, considering the upheaval throughout the whole of Asia. When Persia and China talk about repre-

sentative government and parliaments, one does not care to set any particular seal of impotence on India. But I have always been against looking too far ahead. I have for a long time deprecated the fashion of talking of ideals. In India, at any rate, at present, let our aims and goals be practical, looking forward to the near future without troubling ourselves as to what may be the ultimate goal."

The *Recollections* of Lord Morley unfold a fascinating tale of a constitution in the making. They show us a remarkable intellect engaged in a task of infinite complexity, and refusing to be turned aside from it by counsels of timidity, or the clamour of vested interests. The achievement of his brilliant lieutenant ten years later has overshadowed the great work which Lord Morley, assisted by a Viceroy of singular honesty and steadfastness of purpose, accomplished amidst difficulties which cannot be adequately realized at the present day. But the historian of the future will place the Radical statesman high among the builders of the Empire.

Foremost among the men, who assisted in the birth of the new era, stood Mr. Gokhale. He had outlived the obloquy and ridicule of those unhappy days, when he was violently assailed by his political opponents for having the manliness to retract



his statements when he had found himself in the wrong. His fine character, his lofty aims, his mastery of facts and his simple eloquence singularly fitted him to become the spokesman of his country, and exercised a powerful influence on the course of events at this juncture.

The share of Pherozeshah in the shaping of the Reforms was less direct, though equally decisive in many respects. The Aga Khan well put it when he said at the memorial meeting held in London in December, 1915, that "he was a strong barrier against destructive tendencies, and did a great work for India in helping to form and guide a body of moderate opinion which encouraged Lord Morley and Lord Minto to shape their great reform scheme on liberalising lines." Sir William Wedderburn, Mr. Gokhale and other advocates of India's cause were in constant touch with him, and his clear grasp of principles and unique experience of public affairs invested his criticisms and suggestions with considerable importance. The Bombay correspondent of *The Capital* in an outburst of enthusiasm described the Morley-Minto Reforms as a personal triumph for Pherozeshah. After referring to the Indian Councils Act of 1892, he went on to say :—

"For seventeen years he was the most prominent and potent force in the vindication of the right and ability of Indians to

share in the administration of their country. His genius inspired the devotion and stimulated the endeavour of Mr. Gokhale. Between them they created a body of respectable public opinion which is the true justification of the Reforms Scheme of Lords Morley and Minto. It is not too much to say that Sir Pherozeshah Mehta is as completely identified with this great measure of relief as Daniel O'Connell with Catholic Emancipation. . . . .

I, therefore, regard the Reforms Scheme as a great personal triumph for Sir Pherozeshah Mehta. It is the fulfilment of the prophetic vision he had in the Congress tent at Calcutta nearly twenty years ago."

In the sense that Pherozeshah's was the driving force that gave strength and direction to the demand for political rights and privileges, and that his great work on the Legislative Councils, the Corporation and the University was the best justification of the claims of Indians to be able to manage their own affairs, the tribute may well be regarded as a just appreciation of the man and his work. Lecky has said of Daniel O'Connell that "if he had never arisen, Emancipation would doubtless have been at length conceded, but it would have been conceded as a boon, and it would have been most certainly accompanied and qualified by

the veto." It might with the necessary differences be said of Pherozeshah that if he had never arisen, the goal of responsible government would ultimately have been reached, but the measure of advance would have been halting and slow, and the wheels of progress would probably have run off the path of peaceful evolution.

The rules and regulations framed in connection with the Morley-Minto reforms were of a retrograde character, and robbed the scheme of much of its value and statesmanlike purpose. They hastened the demand which was to spring up within a very few years for a measure of self-government, which would give the representatives of the people a real voice in the administration of the country's affairs—a vastly different thing from the opportunities of influencing the course of events which was practically all that the Act of 1909 and the rules framed under it provided. Lord Minto, in the course of a notable speech delivered by him at the first meeting of the newly-formed Imperial Legislative Council held on 25th January, 1910, had ventured to dogmatize in a typically official manner:—

“We have distinctly maintained that representative government in its Western sense is totally inapplicable to the Indian empire, and would be uncongenial to the traditions of the Eastern populations, that Indian conditions do not admit of popular

representation, that the safety and welfare of this country must depend on the supremacy of British administration, and that supremacy can in no circumstances be delegated to any kind of representative assembly."

Little did he dream that within less than a decade India would be on the high road to the acquisition of that very system of government which he regarded as totally inapplicable to Eastern conditions, and that the reforms which he had inaugurated and regarded as adequate for her needs for as long a time as one could see, would so soon have to give place to a vastly more ambitious scheme of self-government. Truly has Mr. Ramsay Macdonald observed, "the intention of reformers is nothing and the internal momentum of reforms is everything."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

LORD SYDENHAM AND THE UNIVERSITY.

1909-1912.

LORD Curzon had claimed for his Universities legislation that a new life for Higher Education in India had been born. But as with other ambitious schemes of that restless Viceroy, the work to which he had set his hand languished after his retirement, and many thorny questions remained unsettled. They formed a fruitful source of controversy a few years later when Sir George Clarke came out as Governor of Bombay, and decided to put the coping stone on Lord Curzon's work.

The new Governor lost no time in formulating his ideas and setting things in motion for carrying them into effect. Hostilities commenced with a letter from the Government to the University, dated the 18th December, 1908, which purported to be a reply to a request from the Senate to the Chancellor for advice as to the changes necessary in the curriculum. The letter stated that radical reforms were necessary if the teaching of science and higher education generally were to be brought into harmony with modern requirements : —

“ Viewed as a whole, the general result

presents the appearance of patchwork, illogical in many respects and plainly inadequate to meet the demands of the present day. The Governor-in-Council did not propose to offer detailed criticisms, which the most cursory study of the University syllabus would suggest. It sufficed to point out that there were too many examinations and too many subjects in certain cases, that there was no proper division into well-ordered courses and rational continuity of study, and that consequently there had been a marked want of thoroughness. It naturally followed that the results of Higher Education in the Presidency had been disappointing. A high standard of excellence was rarely attained either on the Arts or on the Science side, and with too few exceptions, the University had not produced graduates who had evinced capacity for original work in the various branches of knowledge."

The proposals which were formulated were briefly, the abolition of the Matriculation and the Previous examinations, college examinations being substituted in their place; the curtailment of the compulsory and the enlargement of the number of optional subjects; the strengthening of science courses and teaching generally; and a

revision of the courses and subjects for the various university examinations. The Senate appointed in March, 1909, a committee for considering and reporting on these proposals. The committee issued its report in October, but it was not till the 15th of January, 1910, that the subject came up for discussion before the Senate, presided over by Sir Narayan Chandavarkar, then Vice-Chancellor. It was a curious report altogether. It was signed by six members, while the dissenting minute contained seven signatures !

When the report was placed before the Senate, Pherozeshah moved that the letter of the Government and the recommendations of the committee be recorded. Then followed a series of detailed propositions based on the report of the committee, which had negatived almost all the recommendations made by Government. In a speech which, at the end of an hour and a half, still remained unfinished, and which, "as a feat of endurance reflected equal credit on the audience and the orator," as was sarcastically observed by one of his critics, Pherozeshah strongly criticized the attitude adopted by Government in dealing with the question. He condemned their interference in the work of the Senate as extremely unfortunate and undesirable, and as unwise as it was impolitic. He thought every Fellow of the Senate must to a certain extent feel that organized as that body

was, it would be far better for the integrity and independence of the University to allow educational men to bring forward proposals in the first instance, and then send them to the Governor-in-Council for sanction. He put it to them whether it was not right, wise and constitutional that they should be allowed without any direct interference from Government to work out the principles and details of the educational system in a manner that was considered to be the best by the deliberate and collective wisdom of that body.

Having protested against the procedure, Pherozeshah proceeded to criticize at length the various positions taken up in the letter of the Government, and the attitude adopted by the dissenting members of the committee, particularly by Mr. Fardunji Dastur, Registrar of the University and a mathematician of some repute, who had attacked the old system as having turned out "mere smatterers and crammers and pedants," and encouraged the growth of a class of "noisy encyclopædic gramophones." At the close of his speech, Pherozeshah defined his own attitude towards University reform. He said the end and aim of education was the acquisition of knowledge and the training of the intellect so that knowledge might be properly and efficiently used. He was free to admit he was not quite satisfied with the output of the University. But they must adapt



means to ends, and find out what were the real reasons which prevented further improvements, and the measures that were necessary for effecting them. It was no use relying upon curricula. The mischief was much deeper, and he hoped the Senate and everybody interested in education would bear in mind that educational progress depended not upon the number of University examinations or the courses of study in colleges, but upon the condition of the High Schools. They must be manned and equipped in the way in which they were equipped in other parts of the world.

After a protracted debate which occupied three sittings, the first part of Pherozeshah's motion for recording the Government letter and the report of the committee was carried. Then came the fight over the various propositions moved by him, particularly with regard to the Matriculation examination, which he was strongly for retaining, and which Government and their supporters in the Senate were desirous of abolishing. In replying to the discussion, Pherozeshah compared it with an imaginary debate on the abolition of the institution of matrimony, and asked whether it would be right to do away with such an institution because it was not free from defects and disadvantages. It is not possible to say how many votes this homely argument captured, but the majority in favour of the proposition was very large, and

the ill-fated examination, the sport of warring factions, for the time being at least, escaped the destructive zeal of the reformer.

The fate of the Previous examination was not so happily or easily decided. Pherozechah moved for its retention, as it formed "the point of bifurcation for the Arts, Professional and Scientific studies." He was not one of those who believed that examinations were an evil to be avoided as far as possible. Properly conducted, they served as useful tests of the work of both students and professors. It was, therefore, not desirable to leave the students in the first year without the disciplinary check of a university examination. Among the various amendments moved to this proposition, there was one by Dr. Surveyor to the effect that the Previous be abolished, and that the first Arts and Science examinations be held at the end of two years. This amendment was defeated by the casting vote of the Vice-Chancellor. The original proposition met with a like fate. It was thrown out by a solitary vote, and the Senate found itself after a protracted discussion of the subject in the curious position of having rejected all recommendations, both for and against the retention of the Previous. In this confused state of affairs, at Pherozechah's suggestion, the meeting was dissolved.

Soon after this Pherozechah left for Europe,

and did not return till the beginning of the following year. The opportunity was too good to be missed, and Mr. Sharp, Director of Public Instruction, who was the official mouth-piece of the Government, brought up again before the Senate all the proposals originally formulated by Government, excepting the abolition of the Matriculation, and in October, 1910, they were adopted "with such modifications as were needed to make the transition to a new period smooth and continuous." A committee was appointed to frame detailed regulations for the Arts courses. The unfortunate P. E. was left alone for the time being. It did not survive long, however, and on the 25th January, 1913, it too received its death-warrant.

The next stage in the proceedings was when the committee appointed to revise the Arts courses submitted its report to the Senate, which considered it on the 17th July, 1911. A considerable amount of heat was engendered on this occasion by the reactionary proposal to drop the study of English history from the list of compulsory subjects in the B. A. examination. It was moved by Mr. Natrajan, the talented editor of the *Indian Social Reformer*, and all the forces of Government were arrayed in support of it. A whip had been issued, and a machine-made majority had gathered obedient to the call to carry out the behests of a reactionary Governor. Considering the many

foolish and mischievous remedies which British administrators in their wisdom have prescribed for the growing ills of the body politic in India, the opponents of the proposal before the Senate might be forgiven for suspecting that it was conceived not in the interests of education, but from motives of expediency. The bureaucratic imagination had taken fright at the idea of raw youths being fed on the noble story of the struggle for freedom which enriches the pages of English history. Away, therefore, with such pernicious literature, in the blessed name of specialization.

Pherozeshah was vehemently opposed to the change. The manner in which it was sought to be introduced was calculated to prevent the Senate from approaching the consideration of the question on its merits. Mr. Gokhale had alluded to the 'whip,' and the Director of Public Instruction had employed the personal argument, and replied by asking whether Pherozeshah had never issued one. The latter indignantly repudiated the suggestion :—

“ Mr. Sharp will be surprised to hear that in the course of a public career which has extended over 40 years, not only in this University, not only in the Municipality, but also in the Legislative Councils of this country, both Imperial and Provincial, there has never been a time

when I have issued a whip. And why ? Because I was brought up in the historical traditions of the great beings who have guided the educational history of this Presidency, whose antecedents and traditions have been respectfully watched by people like me, and who have always taught us that in a body constituted like the Senate of the University, it was wrong, improper and objectionable to issue a whip."

As for specialization, Pherozeshah continued, the highest educational authorities in England and America and on the Continent maintained that it must come at a later stage, and must be founded on a broad and general culture. This was also the opinion of one of the greatest educationists in the Presidency, Dr. Selby, who, in his Convocation address as Vice-Chancellor, had said a few years before that the enemy that he spied in the future was the specialist and the advocate of exclusive specialization. Pherozeshah was emphatically of opinion that if the Senate specialized in the manner in which they were asked to do, they would be emasculating the growth and culture of the students trained under such a system. The study of English History was of paramount importance to the people, and particularly to the rising educated classes of this country. Not all the eloquence, incisiveness and readiness of argument

of the speaker, which had so often turned defeat into victory, were able, however, to influence the serried ranks which the mandate from the Chancellor had brought together, and the proposal of Mr. Natrajan was carried.

A few months afterwards, Pherozechah attempted to re-open the subject, when the revised regulations for the B. A. examination, recommended by the Syndicate, were placed before the Senate for adoption. He wanted to take the opportunity for moving an amendment for the inclusion of English history in the compulsory group. The Vice-Chancellor ruled the amendment out of order. Pherozechah wanted to be heard before the point was decided, and he made more than one attempt to speak. But the Vice-Chancellor was obdurate, and declined to allow Pherozechah to address him with regard to his ruling.

The incident was unfortunate, and with a little tact might have been avoided. The Vice-Chancellor might well have shown greater consideration than he did to a colleague who had rendered distinguished services to the University, and who was fighting against considerable odds for what he believed to be the best interests of higher education. The ruling led to a somewhat unpleasant controversy, which inevitably assumed a personal aspect, and which certainly did not add to the reputation of the Senate or the parties concerned.

On 2nd July, 1912, Pherozeshah moved for a committee for the purpose of revising the regulations of the University with regard to the conduct of business. He said that the rules as they existed were of a most cumbrous, impracticable and unintelligible character, and often tied down the hands of the Senate. One of them provided that no speeches should be made on a point of order, and that the chairman should be the sole judge. With regard to that he submitted that even the Speaker in the House of Commons not only allowed members to speak on a point of order, but also invited them to assist him in arriving at a proper conclusion, and himself gave reasons for his rulings on particular occasions. *The Times of India* had stated that there was an impression abroad that the proposition was intended as an attack on the Vice-Chancellor, and that it could hardly believe that Pherozeshah would allow his personal irritation to lead him to make a proposal so fraught with chaotic consequences. The mover scornfully repelled the charge. He scarcely thought that any responsible editor would descend to such an unworthy insinuation, and he asked members of the Senate not to be carried away by this attempt to prejudice the proposition which he had placed before them on the unanimous recommendation of the Syndicate.

The discussion which followed was not of an

edifying character. Personal motives were freely imputed to Pherozeshah by several speakers. Sir Ramkrishna Bhandarkar, the first Indian Doctor of Laws of the Bombay University, and an Oriental Scholar of considerable reputation, so far forgot himself as to charge the mover of the proposition with employing obstructive tactics where Indian Vice-Chancellors were concerned. Replying on the debate, Pherozeshah observed that in the course of a long public life, he had learnt to receive knocks—and sometimes they were hard knocks—with equanimity and cheerfulness, and sometimes also with enjoyment. But it was with great pain that he heard Sir Ramkrishna charge him, who had always stood up for Indians, with something as devoid of foundation as of truth, and it was all the more painful to him that the Vice-Chancellor should not have said one word of expostulation or reproach. He had been attacked in several quarters with having introduced a personal feeling into the matter. But he had assured them on more than one occasion that he had been actuated by honest and conscientious motives, and he had always admitted that the Vice-Chancellor, whether he agreed with him or differed from him, had endeavoured to do what he considered to be his duty. Everybody knew the esteem and friendship with which the speaker had for years regarded Sir Narayan. Was he to



be told that because he happened to differ from the latter, and wanted to discuss those differences, that he was actuated by personal feeling ?

The proposition on being put to the vote was carried by 38 votes to 30, and an end was put to a most unpleasant controversy. That it did not leave any bitterness behind was due to the dignified and conciliatory tone of Pherozeshah's speech in reply, and to the admirable temper preserved by the Vice-Chancellor, who had made it clear from the beginning that having regard to his relations with his old leader, he would not mind any criticisms coming from him, for they would not be misunderstood.

The various other 'reforms' on which Lord Sydenham had set his heart were carried at later meetings of the Senate, and the long-drawn battle ended, in which the honours went to the vanquished and the spoils to the victor. The High Priest of the Indo-British Association had triumphed over the great leader, whose personality had dominated the Senate until the Universities Act altered its character and made it more amenable to official control. It would, of course, be absurd to suggest that the changes inaugurated had nothing to recommend them, or that those who supported them had all been inspired with the sinister motive of making higher education serve the ends of those in authority. If the reforms had been introduced with due regard to the objections and

susceptibilities of those whose advice and experience were entitled to respect, some of them at least might have commanded the assent of the opposition so ably led by Pherozechah. But from the very first it was clear from the procedure that was adopted, that it was going to be a duel between the forces of the Government on one side, and those of the 'popular' party in the Senate on the other. It was not a case of a Chancellor asking an independent and unbiassed Senate in the exercise of his right as head of the University to consider his suggestions for reform. It was a Governor steeped in bureaucratic traditions who was dictating the type of education which he thought the University ought to adopt. With such an unfortunate beginning, it would have been strange if the course of educational reforms had run smooth. However much sophists might explain it away, Pherozechah was thoroughly in the right in resenting as he did an undoubted encroachment upon the integrity and independence of the Senate—resentment which was shared, among others, by one of the most distinguished educationists of the day, the Reverend Dr. Mackichan, Principal of the Wilson College, who regarded it as an inversion of the University procedure for the Government to submit to the Senate a set of proposals for its approval. That was a constitutional issue, and it coloured the

whole proceedings in a way which rendered the dispassionate examination of the main question somewhat difficult. To a man of Pherozeshah's sturdy independence and deep-seated reverence for constitutional forms and formalities, it seemed to be an intolerable position that any changes which the times might demand should be imposed from above, and he never seemed to be quite able to get away from the influence of that idea. Then there was that innate conservatism, which strangely enough in a man who had fought for reforms all his life, made him on many occasions a determined foe of all violent changes. For all that, Pherozeshah's views on many of the proposals before the Senate were marked by his characteristic common-sense and by a wide acquaintance with educational problems. He seldom fought better. His great debating powers, resourcefulness and dialectical skill were rarely displayed to better advantage than when he was fighting a battle which he knew was lost. Lord Sydenham with the aid of an officialized majority triumphed for the time being over his formidable opponent. He failed, however, to dislodge him from the position he occupied, and the great leader lived to be appointed as the administrative head of that very body in which his influence had been sought to be discounted by narrow-minded men intolerant of opposition.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### VISIT TO EUROPE.

1910-1911.

FEW men had led such a crowded life as Pheroze-shah, and the strain of it began to tell increasingly as he approached the Psalmist's 'three score and ten.' His careful habits and frequent visits to Matheran and other hill-stations had enabled him all these years to maintain his strength and activities. But prolonged and complete rest was necessary to a man who was required to be in the thick of the fight in every place. Since his last trip to Europe in 1897, he had not enjoyed much rest, or known a real holiday. It was necessary for him to tear himself completely away from his surroundings, and to get away to a place where the dust and heat of political controversy might not affect him. He decided accordingly to leave for Europe in the summer of 1910.

There was a general desire to give him a public entertainment before his departure, and a representative committee was formed for carrying out the arrangements. The entertainment came off on the 18th April, 1910, in the spacious grounds of

the Princess Mary Victoria Gymkhana at Colaba, tastefully decorated for the occasion, and was very largely attended by men and women of all communities. Lord Sydenham conveyed his regrets at being unavoidably absent, and felt confident that "the universal appreciation of Sir Pherozeshah's eminent services to Bombay" would ensure the success of the entertainment. A letter was also received from the venerable Dadabhai Naoroji, which stated that "for his great services to the city as well as to the whole country, Sir Pherozeshah richly deserved their gratitude."

The health of the guest of the evening was proposed by Mr. (afterwards Sir) Charles Armstrong, one of the leaders of the European mercantile community in Bombay, in a few well-chosen words. He said the name of Pherozeshah had been a household word for years. They knew him as a public-spirited citizen of the best type, a fine speaker, an excellent debater and a hard fighter. They knew him also as a man with an excellent memory, with clear and decided views on every question and with an infinite fund of knowledge. In fact, as a citizen of no mean city, he was an easy first amongst many prominent and clever men. In those felicitous terms which he knew how to employ on occasions of this character, Pherozeshah thanked those present for the honour they had done

him. He told them of an incident in his early career which was not generally known :—

“ I remember that immediately after I began my career, I had to make a choice between entering public service—I mean official service—and entering, if I may so discriminate, the service of the public. It is not known even to some of my most intimate friends that very shortly after my return from England after being called to the Bar, an eminent member of Government—a most broad-minded man and a man of high liberal culture—sent for me and offered me the post of first-class sub-judgeship. It was a problem that I had to solve, for though I had joined the lawyer’s profession, briefs were not too frequently coming in those days, and some of my friends taunted me that my income just enabled me to go to an ice-cream shop. But I unhesitatingly chose to enter the service of the public. And the reason why I am grateful to you for this gathering and hospitality is that you accept what I have done during the last more than forty years as showing that I have not entirely thrown away the years without doing some little and abiding good.”

After a gentle dig at those who sometimes called

him a revolutionist and sometimes an obstructionist in educational matters, Pherozeshah proceeded to say that the spirit which had led him to serve the public was the spirit which had been generated by the education, which was one of the most precious gifts conferred upon the people of India by British rule. It had become a fashion to decry that education as godless, but without entering into a controversy, he would emphatically maintain that it had been the means of instilling a loftier and nobler conception of moral, political and social duties than had ever existed in this country. He concluded with a note of appreciation of the spirit of cordial and harmonious co-operation which had always existed in the different communities in Bombay, and to which he owed a great deal of what little he had been able to do for the City.

On the 23rd April, 1910, Pherozeshah left for England in company with Lady Mehta, his second wife—his first wife, whom he had married before he left for England to study for the Bar, had died in November, 1907,—and had a hearty send-off at the Pier. The voyage was pleasant and uneventful, and Pherozeshah felt none of that sickness which had made his first seatrip such an agonizing experience. After doing Naples, Rome, Florence and other places, the party reached Paris on the 1st of June. On the Conti-

nent, Pherozechah attracted considerable attention wherever he went. He had a presence which easily picked him out from a crowd, and dress and manner alike added a touch of distinction. His style of living and the Turkish cap he affected so impressed a hotel manager that he thought the distinguished stranger was the Shah of Persia !

He did not stay long on the Continent, for, with his tastes and habits, he soon got tired of sight-seeing, and he was anxious to get to London where his friends desired him to meet some of the leading figures in English political life. His arrival was prominently noticed in several London and provincial newspapers, and he received marked attention in quarters sympathetic towards Indian interests. The London Union Society entertained him at dinner at the Westminster Palace Hotel on the 2nd July. Many prominent men received him with cordiality, among them being three ex-Governors of Bombay, Lords Reay, Harris and Lamington, who were very glad to see the redoubtable opponent who had caused them in the years gone by so many uncomfortable moments. The Dowager Lady Lamington was greatly struck by the fact that he could converse so brilliantly on all manner of subjects in a foreign tongue.

There was one matter in which Sir William Wedderburn was particularly anxious to secure Pherozechah's co-operation, and that was the ill-



fated partition of Bengal. A Bengali deputation headed by Messrs. Surendranath Bannerji and Bhupendranath Basu was to plead with Lord Morley the cause of their unhappy province, and a determined attempt was to be made to unsettle the 'settled fact.' Sir William feared that the arrival of a formal and public deputation would stir up all the mischievous activity of the enemies of Indian progress in Parliament and the Press, and he greatly preferred Pherozeshah undertaking the task and holding the brief for Bengal. In a letter written to Pherozeshah on the 11th May from Vichy, where Sir William had gone to take the waters, he said :—

“On the other hand, you being in England for private reasons can have easy access to Lord Morley ; as you are neither a Bengali nor a Hindu, there is not the defect of partisanship, while the unique position you occupy in India must give exceptional weight to your advice in a matter in which expediency is an important element.”

Pherozeshah saw Lord Morley, and later on, his successor Lord Crewe, and had long discussions with them. He also met the new Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, who was particularly anxious to know at first hand the views of so eminent an Indian on the general political situation. On

all of them, Pherozeshah deeply impressed the fact that the much-talked about unrest had been greatly exaggerated, and that the mass of the people was loyal to the British connection. The partition of Bengal had upset the mental balance of many, and had chiefly contributed to the wave of uneasiness which had swept over the land. It had unhinged the wilder spirits amongst the Extremists. The situation, though difficult enough, was to be viewed in its proper perspective, and could easily be handled by generous statesmanship. These interviews greatly strengthened the efforts which Sir William Wedderburn was making to undo what Bengali opinion regarded as a grievous wrong.

Another direction in which Pherozeshah exerted himself while in London was with reference to the settlement of the outstanding differences between the Hindus and the Mohamedans. The Mohamedan community, owing to its general illiteracy and the consequent weakness of its position, had hitherto pursued a selfish policy, and kept itself more or less aloof from the currents of national life. The time had come for removing the more acute differences, and bringing the communities closer together. Sir William was going out to India as President of the next Congress, and the idea was to hold a friendly Conference in Bombay for the purpose of clearing the ground, and doing away, if possible, with the conflict of principles

and interests, which had so long kept the two communities apart. At the banquet given in London to the President-elect, Mr. Amir Ali and Pheroze-shah formally mooted the proposal, which had the support of the Aga Khan as well. The outlook appeared to be hopeful, and Pherozechah was confident that the Conference would bring about a closer feeling of comradeship. He himself did not expect to be present at it, though Sir William offered to postpone his departure from Bombay after the Congress was over, if Pherozechah could return to the City a little sooner, and take the Conference under his sheltering wing.

Altogether, Pherozechah had a very pleasant and profitable holiday, and did much to bring home to English statesmen the realities of the Indian situation. His personality lent prestige to the cause he was advocating, and greatly strengthened it. Active propaganda work he was, perhaps, incapable of, alike by temperament and habits. But in the sphere in which he worked, none wielded higher authority, none commanded greater respect. He was not as widely known to the English public as was Mr. Gokhale, for instance; but on those whom he met, he left the impress of an intellect of unusual vigour, and a personality of magnetic influence. As the London correspondent of *The Times of India* wrote:—

“Sir Pherozechah, having come here for

rest, has done little public speaking ; but in many ways he has wielded an important influence. He has had interviews with both the late and the present Secretaries of State for India, and also had a long conversation with Lord Hardinge before his departure to assume the Viceroyalty. Sir Pherozeshah's forceful personality, and his manifest sincerity of purpose, combined with his intimate knowledge of Indian conditions have much impressed the public men with whom he has come into contact, and in many cases have tended to raise their estimate of the Indian leader."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A COMMUNAL CONTROVERSY ; PHEROZESHAH AND THE PARSI.

1911.

PERHOZESHAA returned to Bombay in February, 1911, and found himself in an atmosphere of fierce passions and animosities. For the first time in his many-sided career, he found his name on the lips of every Parsi, and his views and principles the subject of heated discussion in every Parsi home. The occasion was the election of three additional Trustees on the Board of the Parsi Punchayet,—a body which administers the charitable funds of the community—as sanctioned under a scheme framed after a protracted and costly litigation, which seemed to have brought to the surface all the bigotry and fanaticism of which the community was capable. The election of the Trustees assumed for a large section the importance of a life and death problem, and it was the one topic of conversation wherever Parsis gathered in any numbers. The orthodox party wanted the nominees of its own choice to sit on the Board of the Punchayet, in order to conduct its affairs according to its own pet notions. and to preserve inviolate the manners,

usages and superstitions handed down from generation to generation.

In this state of affairs, while Pherozechah was in England, he received a wire in November from six Parsis, among whom were some representatives of the orthodox section, asking his permission to put forward his candidature. He consulted some friends, who persuaded him not to reject such an opportunity of serving his community, and under a belief that his co-religionists wanted him, he signified his assent. He did not know the exact position of affairs, and those whose duty it was to enlighten him before they secured his assent very reprehensibly failed to do so. A violent Press campaign was at once set on foot by his opponents, and when Pherozechah returned, he found he was up against another Caucus, equally energetic and unscrupulous as the one which had attempted to overthrow his supremacy in the Corporation. It would have been well if at this stage Pherozechah had rescued himself from the unfortunate position in which some of his over-zealous friends and admirers had placed him, and if he had declined to have anything to do with an office which could not confer upon him any greater distinction than he enjoyed, and from which a section of the community was determined to exclude him. But, either from an imperfect realization of the forces that were arrayed against him, or because he

was a fighter all his life, he declined to reconsider the position and withdraw his candidature. The result was a complete defeat, though his old colleague, Mr. H. A. Wadya, who had been put up as one of the rival candidates, and who did not feel very happy in the position he occupied, advised the electorate to vote for Pherozechah in preference to himself. It was a foregone conclusion ; it did not, at least, surprise those who knew anything about the organization of the so-called orthodox party, and who were aware of the ease with which the electorate could be manipulated under a scheme directly calculated to facilitate an overwhelming representation of the ignorant and the illiterate.

The defeat of Pherozechah was hailed with exuberant joy by his opponents, and trumpeted in glaring head lines which proclaimed that the community did not want him, and would be quite happy to jog along without the assistance of the "Indispensable." It was intended to serve as a rude rebuff to one who was never tired of declaring that he was an Indian first and a Parsi afterwards. As a matter of fact, the defeat was in no sense a verdict of the community. The vast majority of the educated classes, the men of light and leading, voted solidly for Pherozechah, and had it not been for the hired voters who composed the bulk of the electorate, he would have emerged triumphant, despite the machinations of his puny opponents.

The scheme of election provided ample scope for manipulation, and the victory went to the party with the superior organization and the less scrupulous methods. It was not a clean fight, and what was practically the only defeat at a poll sustained by him during his long and eventful career, could in no sense be regarded as the judgment of the community on its most distinguished member.

It would be useful to examine here in brief the contention put forward by Pherozezshah's detractors that he had shown himself studiously indifferent to the interests of his co-religionists, and that he had given to the country what was meant for his community. It may be admitted that he felt very cold towards many of the questions which agitated the minds of Parsis, and which made them the laughing-stock of other communities, which could not understand the fanaticism and bigotry occasionally displayed by the most civilized and progressive race in all India. He was positively hostile, besides, to the promotion of communal interests as such, holding that the fortunes of the Parsis were linked with those of other Indian nationalities. Nothing could have been more emphatic—and more distasteful to a certain section—than his famous declaration that a Parsi was a better and truer Parsi the more he was attached to the land which gave him birth, the more he was bound in brotherly relations and



affection to all the children of the soil, the more he recognized the fraternity of all the native communities of the country, and the immutable bond which bound them together in the pursuit of common aims and objects under a common Government.

But for all that, ever since the beginning of his career, Pherozeshah took a keen interest in the questions which affected the larger interests of the community. One of his earliest public appearances was at the time of the Parsi-Mohamedan riots of 1874, when, as has been related, he came forward boldly to protest against the conduct of the Government and the Police. The community had been thrown into a ferment over the manner in which it had been treated by those responsible for the public peace, and in the Press and from the platform, Pherozeshah scathingly condemned their weakness and want of sympathy. When some three years later, the question of the leadership of the Parsis arose through the death of the second Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, Pheroze-shah was again to the fore, and his lucid and convincing exposition of the need for a titular leader had not a little to do with influencing the minds of those who were opposed to the principle of the appointment, and entertained serious misgivings as to its practical operation. Again, when the community was thrown into a ferment over

the attack made upon its honour in a report made by Mr. Ommaney, the Inspector-General of Police, to the Government of Lord Reay, Pherozeshah, as we have seen, kept a cool head and used his best endeavours to prevent his co-religionists from playing into the hands of those who resented the action of that courageous Governor in connection with the Crawford inquiry, and who did not scruple to employ every device to discredit him. The role he played was very unpopular—the calm voice of reason is seldom appreciated in moments of excitement—and he was bitterly attacked in the columns of the *Rast-Gofiar* and other papers. His view, however, was characterized by his usual sagacity, and it was not the first time that he found himself going against the currents of popular opinion.

The same sanity of judgment and independence of thought characterized his attitude towards the Rajabai Tower tragedy, which had created an extraordinary sensation in the community, and upset the balance of mind of even the thoughtful. Pherozeshah came to the conclusion that the two unfortunate women, who were the victims in that tragic affair, had lost their lives through an accident, and he did not share the general belief that it was the result of a crime of a particularly detestable character. When, therefore, the late Dr.

that the community would worship him if he took a lead in the matter, he declined to entertain the request, whereupon that high-souled but impulsive doctor left in anger, warning Pherozeshah that the Parsis would be greatly incensed against him for taking up such an attitude.

A more popular part was reserved for him when the Improvement Trust, some two or three years after its inception, notified the Chowpaty Street Scheme, which contemplated the acquisition of several of the properties vested in the Trustees of the Parsi Punchayet. Representations were made by the latter, in which they submitted that the feelings of the community would be greatly offended if the lands were taken over as proposed. No satisfactory settlement was arrived at, however, and at the eleventh hour the Trustees decided to requisition the services of Pherozeshah. The Secretary of the Punchayet, the learned Dr. Jivanji Modi, thereupon saw him, and asked him to draft a representation. Pherozeshah declined on the ground that he had already been fighting the Improvement Trust over the question of the Chowpaty and other schemes, and that it was an invariable principle with him not to accept any professional engagement in a matter with which he had anything to do in a public capacity. It was on that principle that he had refused the 'general retainer' which the Trust had offered him as

counsel, thinking that it would interfere with the independent exercise of his duties as a member of the Corporation. Incidentally, one would like to know how many of our public men are capable of adopting that strict standard of public morality which Pherozeshah so strikingly displayed in these and other matters.

Though declining to mix himself up with the negotiations which the Punchayet was carrying on with the Trust, so long as he was fighting the battle of the public over the same question in the Corporation, Pherozeshah agreed to go through the correspondence which Dr. Modi placed before him. Into the subsequent stages of the matter, it is not necessary to go. Suffice to say that the Trustees of the Punchayet were not able to get the scheme modified in any material particular. There was an uneasy suspicion in the minds of many that the Improvement Trust had got the better of them in every way, and a loud demand arose for calling a public meeting to give expression to the general dissatisfaction at the manner in which the sentiment of the community had been flouted. Pressure was brought to bear on Pherozeshah to give his co-operation and support to the movement, and as the matter had passed out of the hands of the Corporation, he yielded, though he made it clear that it was a forlorn hope and that they were fighting a lost battle.

The meeting was held on the 6th July, 1902, for the purpose of memorializing the Trust and the Government against the acquisition of the lands vested in the Punchayet. The principal resolution was moved by Pherozeshah, whose presence in a purely Parsi gathering must have been a somewhat novel experience to one who seldom attended a Parsi meeting or a wedding or a funeral. The resolution stated that the deepest religious feelings of the community were concerned in the maintenance and preservation in their integrity of the properties in question, that the Chowpaty scheme was not an 'improvement' scheme as such, and that, in consequence, properties should not be compulsorily acquired unless they were grossly insanitary, and that the scheme should be modified in view of these considerations, particularly as the feelings of the community were certain to be seriously injured. The resolution was passed, and a small and influential committee was appointed with Pherozeshah as one of the members to take the necessary steps to safeguard the interests of the Punchayet. The committee did the best it could under the circumstances of the case, and though it was too late to save the properties, it secured modifications in several important particulars. Its recommendations were accepted by the Trustees, and formed the basis upon which the properties were ultimately acquired.

Such were among the services which Pherozechah rendered to the Parsis from time to time. They go to show, at least, his living interest in questions that affected their well-being, and dispose of the absurd charge that he was indifferent to the call of his community. It was a disingenuous cry manufactured in order to prejudice his candidature for the Trusteeship. The fact was that the part played by him at the time of the memorable PUNCHAYET case some years before had greatly offended the extreme elements amongst the orthodox sections of the community. From the time of the Towers of Silence case in the Seventies, which first brought him into prominence, he had had several opportunities of studying the constitution of the Board entrusted with the funds and properties of the Parsi PUNCHAYET, and he had early come to the conclusion that the system of appointing the Trustees which was in vogue was injurious to the best interests of the community, and was in the nature of a usurpation of its inherent rights. His was the hand which guided the movement, which culminated in the long and bitterly contested litigation, which ultimately secured to the Parsis a privilege persistently denied to them. He was always proud of the part he had played in the matter, and even such a staunch exponent of orthodox opinion as the *Sanj-Vartaman* had admitted at the time that he had done a service to his community.

The action of the 'orthodox' party, which succeeded in keeping him out of the Trusteeship, was, therefore, as foolish as it was unworthy. By what strange process of reasoning, if reasoning there was, the electors were induced to reject the services of the finest intellect the community had ever produced, they alone could tell. A Calcutta journal was led to remark that the Parsis had provided no more characteristic farce for a generation, and we might well leave the matter at that.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### A TRIANGULAR CONTEST—THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION.

1911-1913.

WITHIN a few weeks of the Panchayet elections another notable contest took place, and Pheroze-shah was again to be found in the thick of it. Their Imperial Majesties King George and Queen Mary were coming out on what proved to be a historic mission, and the honour of receiving the first Sovereign of England to set foot on the shores of India was one round which many hopes and ambitions centred. It was the turn of a Hindu member to become President of the Corporation. By an absurd convention, adopted at first as a measure of expediency, but entirely unsuited to the changed conditions of the times, the members of the different communities were appointed to the chair by turns. The convention survives to the present day, thanks to the warm support given to it by men who are otherwise never tired of prating about democracy and national unity. On the occasion in question, the Hindu candidate was Mr. Manmohandas Ramji, a well-known member of the community, who had rendered



useful services to the City. Against him was pitted Sir Sassoon J. David, one of the merchant princes of Bombay, who exercised a considerable amount of silent influence in the Corporation.

When Pherozeshah returned from Europe, he found a hot contest in progress, and there is no doubt that the "Local Earl of Warwick" would have intervened as before, and settled the matter in his own happy and summary way. But for once it was destined that the man who had saved the dignity of the Corporation on many such occasions by imposing his will upon rival ambitions, should himself be the cause of the bitterest contest for the presidential chair that had ever been seen. He was asked by over-zealous admirers to stand as a candidate, and in a weak moment he yielded to their importunities. The fight really lay between Pherozeshah and Sir Sassoon, and the third candidate was very much in the position of the Irish 'bloc' in the House of Commons, too weak to challenge the supremacy of his rivals, but able to turn the scale in favour of either of them. The issue was very uncertain till the last, as the canvassing was very keen, and there were several doubtful voters capable of being captured and recaptured several times over.

Considerable public interest centred round the election when it was known that the King-maker's authority was to be challenged, and his own passage

to the throne was to be contested inch by inch. The contest proved to be very exciting, and the issue was left in doubt till the last moment. The election took place on the 3rd April, 1911. Before the time fixed for the meeting, there was an unusually large attendance of members, and the gallery was filled with spectators. At the appointed hour, Sir Bhalchandra Krishna, ever loyal to his friend and leader, rose and proposed his election. He was seconded by Mr. Ibrahim Rahimtulla, whom also it was a pleasure to see by the side of Pherozeshah on this notable occasion. When the other candidates had been duly proposed and seconded, the voting was taken, and after an agonizing suspense the result was declared as follows :—

Sir Pherozeshah Mehta   .. 26 votes.

Sir Sassoon David       .. 25   ,,

Mr. Manmohandas Ramji .. 12   ,,

The announcement was wildly cheered by the crowd of people collected in and outside the Municipal Hall. The President on assuming the chair thanked the Corporation for the honour they had done him for the fourth time. He observed that when he was first approached in the matter, he seriously considered whether it was right and proper on his part to allow his name to be put forward. He came to the conclusion that if the Corporation desired to honour him, it was not an occasion when

he would allow personal considerations to weigh with him, and that the best course was to submit to the judgment and wishes of his friends and colleagues. If the Corporation and the City wished that he should be their representative on a memorable and historic occasion, his feeling was that he would leave the matter entirely in their hands. Civic work was to him a labour of love, and it was through feelings of deep and sincere affection for the City that he cheerfully continued his labours. As an explanation of the reasons which prompted the King-maker to enter into a triangular contest for an honour, the bestowal of which had been practically within his gift for a number of years, the statement was not calculated to meet the criticisms of those who looked upon the action as a grievous mistake. The comments of the Bombay correspondent of the *Capital* on the speech were brief and caustic :—

“The victor accepted the crown with mock-modesty, his heart fluttering the while with fierce lust of a triumph gained by a destruction of all the decencies of public life which he himself had helped to establish.”

This may be regarded as an extreme view of the matter, and as partly inspired by a passion for linguistic effect, but there is no doubt the election did not evoke the universal approbation, which the

great services of Pherozeshah had called forth on similar occasions in the past. There were those, even among his admirers, who felt very strongly that he would have been well advised if he had not yielded to the importunities of his friends. *The Times of India*, which had then come under the direction of a singularly able and broad-minded editor, Mr. (now Sir) Stanley Reed, put the case very fairly when it observed :—

“ The selection of Sir Pherozeshah for the office in what will be a historic year, secures that the city shall be represented by a distinguished figure, and one who has laboured hard for its welfare. Yet fully recognizing the value of his services, we think it would have been more graceful if Sir Pherozeshah had not offered himself as a candidate at the eleventh hour, and had remained aside in favour of the men who have been less richly gifted with civic honours. The Corporation recognizes his great services, but it has not been backward in acknowledging them. It has given him a monopoly of its representation in the Legislative Council, even to the extent of disfranchising itself during his absence in England, and all members willingly stepped aside to make way for him when Their Majesties came to India as Prince and Princess of Wales.

Worthily as we know Sir Pherozeshah will represent the city on this occasion, it is a pity that the King and Queen should be laid under the impression that there is only one fit for the highest civic honour in the second city of the Empire, or that people should begin to think that Sir Pherozeshah desires to monopolise the civic honours that have been so cheerfully and ungrudgingly accorded to him in full measure in the past."

With a great deal of this criticism, it is impossible not to agree. Pherozeshah's candidature for the chair under the circumstances that existed must be regarded as the most ill-advised action of his career. His success brought him no accession of strength or prestige. His defeat would have been disastrous. The writer remembers discussing the matter the very evening the election took place with one of his oldest political associates. It was distressing to the latter that the man who had been so long the sole arbiter in the matter of the choice of a president, should himself have to find his way to the chair by a precarious majority of one after a hard and none too dignified contest. That was a feeling which was shared by many of Pherozeshah's admirers, who greatly regretted the position in which he had placed himself. But even Jupiter nods sometimes.

The address of the Corporation to Their Majesties was drafted by Pherozeshah, as were so many others on like occasions, and contained many felicitous touches. Emphasis was laid on the significance of the royal visit. It was in effect a proclamation to the world of the position which India held in the Empire, and in the sympathies of the Royal House, and a demonstration that the Crown was "the living bond uniting many different races in varying climes under the flag which stands for ideals of justice, righteousness and progress." The same note had been struck by Pherozeshah a little while before in the eloquent speech which he had made at the public meeting held under the presidency of Sir George Clarke for the purpose of concerting measures for the reception of Their Majesties. He did not believe it was a merely ceremonial visit, and he seemed to read into it a special significance.

When the citizens of Bombay met again on the 3rd February, 1912, after the eventful visit was over, to give expression to their sense of the beneficent and far-reaching results of the visit, Pherozeshah, who was in the chair, re-called his glowing periods on the previous occasion, and claimed that he had been something of a prophet: and he thanked Providence that, working under good report and evil for nearly half a century with greater men, many of whom had passed

away, he had lived long enough to be blessed with a sight of the promised land. Those who listened to the old leader on the occasion, and knew his enthusiasm and active interest in the preparations for according Their Majesties a fitting welcome, must have readily forgiven him the election he had been persuaded to contest, and felt that Bombay had indeed been worthily represented on a great and memorable occasion.

## II.

Following upon the King's historic visit, and while his message of Hope was still ringing in the ears of men came the announcement in July, 1912, of the appointment of a Royal Commission to examine and report upon the Public Services in India. The personnel of that Commission, though not as favourable to Indian interests as it might have been, was such as to command respect, and the inclusion of Mr. Gokhale afforded a guarantee that its conclusions would not be of a reactionary character. Mr. Gokhale himself felt hopeful, and in a letter to Pherozeshah written before he left for South Africa, deprecated the general attitude of distrust of the Commission, and urged Indian leaders to put their case before it as strongly as possible. He was evidently not a believer in Non-Co-operation. He was prepared

to make the best of what he had got, and carry on the fight without sulking, without flinching.

When the Commission came to Bombay in March, 1913, in the course of its rambles, Pherozezshah was examined on behalf of the Bombay Presidency Association which had submitted a very able and carefully argued memorandum on the questions under discussion. One of the most telling passages in it was the one in which it was pointed out with reference to the perpetual platitudes about maintaining Indian administration on English lines, that the real position was that Englishmen in India were generally strictly opposed to follow English lines in Indian administration. If, however, the memorandum went on to argue, by that somewhat nebulous phrase was meant the application of principles deduced from the most advanced education and culture and the progressive experience derived from all ages and climes, then, English education would qualify Indians to apply them to Indian administration under the guiding statesmanship of England as well as, or perhaps better than Englishmen could, hampered as the latter were by the bias and prejudices engendered by belonging to the ruling race. It was a bold statement characteristic of Pherozezshah, and that it went home was apparent from the lively cross-examination to which he was subjected.

There was a larger attendance of the public than



at any previous sitting, when the formidable Bombay leader appeared before the Commission, and those who came in expectation of a spirited encounter were not disappointed. The manner of the witness appeared to be a little hesitating at first, but as he warmed up to the task, he spoke with all his accustomed vigour and outspokenness. He was strongly in favour of simultaneous examinations for the Civil Service, and though he urged no arguments which had not been urged a hundred times before by him and by scores of other politicians, repetition did not rob them of their force. He attacked the existing system and showed up its weaknesses in a manner not suited to the taste of some of the superior individuals gathered round the table. Sir Murray Hammick of the Madras Council was visibly perturbed, and his irritation found expression in an observation which did little credit to his intelligence, and which caused a mild ripple of excitement. "I should understand from your remark that in your opinion it is far better that the English should clear out of the country at once." "Not a bit of it," quickly retorted Pherozeshah; "I have been one of the most staunch advocates of the continuance of British rule in India." After that, as may well be imagined, the sword-play between the two men became distinctly lively. Pherozeshah stuck to his position that English education would qualify Indians to rule the country as well as

Englishmen, who were labouring under considerable prejudices, and he followed up that statement by observing that somehow or other there was a rooted dislike to the educated Indian in the average Civilian. The 'discontented B.A.' was the cherished *bête noir* of most Anglo-Indians. As he told another member of the Commission, one reason was that probably educated Indians were pressing too close upon the heels of Anglo-Indians and officials. He came to these conclusions very regretfully, he added, for he had the highest regard for the English people.

In answer to Mr. Gokhale, Pherozeshah dwelt further on the deficiencies of Civil Service rule. He repeated what he had often pointed out from his long and intimate experience, that able as English Civilians were, and possessing as they did many great qualities, they were and they remained almost to the end of their career ignorant of the ways and thoughts and habits of the people to a remarkable extent. Asked by Sir Theodore Morison about his views as to an indigenous system of education, he observed that he was for Indian culture, but he held that it could best be developed in India through English education. It was English education which had taught them to appreciate Indian culture as founded upon its history and its own literature. He had reverence for the Classics. Latin and Greek literature and history were valuable not merely for one-sided development, but as

laying down principles for all development and all culture. At the end of his examination, Pherozeshah reiterated his conviction that simultaneous examinations were the only way of effectuating the solemn declaration that there was to be no governing caste in India. Englishmen could not possibly retrace their steps after the Statutes of 1833, 1853 and 1870. It was incumbent on them to bear in mind Lord Clive's saying, "To stand still is dangerous ; to retreat is ruin."

The cross-examination lasted for some hours. The witness was combative, but courteous, and expressed himself very freely. He left no doubt in the mind of the Commission as to the point of view of the school of thought to which he belonged. His mental alertness saved him from the pitfalls prepared for him by the ingenuity of his examiners, and he succeeded in putting up altogether a very strong case.

The labours of the Commission materialized some two years later in a report which seemed to please no one. The outbreak of a world-wide war, which drew from India a magnificent rally to the cause of the Empire and its gallant Allies, profoundly altered the outlook, and gave new articulation to her hopes and aspirations. The publication of the Report was, therefore, singularly inopportune. The country seemed at one bound to have covered the track of generations, and to be

no longer content to march with halting steps towards a distant goal. The manner in which the Commission had dealt with the all-absorbing question of simultaneous examinations added to the lack of enthusiasm with which its conclusions were received. The Indian view of the case suffered greatly, besides, by the sad and untimely death of Mr. Gokhale. His capacious mind with its vast stores of knowledge, fortified by the experience and political sagacity of Pherozeshah with whom he was constantly in touch, would have illumined the pages of the Report, and made it a political document of the highest value. It was the one concern of his closing days. He had a prolonged conference about it with Pherozeshah in the latter's house the evening before he left for Poona, never more to return. He was stricken down within less than a fortnight, leaving incomplete the last great task he undertook in the service of the land he loved so well. With his disappearance, the Public Services Commission lost whatever title it had to the confidence of the country, and the Report, barring an able minute of dissent by Mr. Justice Abdul Rahim of Madras, proved utterly disappointing to a public hoping against hope for a gesture of true statesmanship.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### CLOSING YEARS.

1911-1915.

THE closing years of Pherozeshah's career were in some respects the most difficult period of his life. Struggling against physical infirmities and the encroachments of Time, he was called upon to defend his position against the assaults delivered against it by an autocratic Governor, who found in 'Ferocious' Mehta the most formidable opponent of his reactionary policy. The question had to be decided, who was to reign in Bombay; the masterful leader who had so long dominated the Corporation, the Senate and the Council, or the equally masterful administrator who was apt to approach problems of government from the point of view of a military scientist. There were once two Kings in Brentford; there certainly could not be two in Bombay.

The stage was soon reached when the views of the two men came into sharp conflict. The struggle began with the question of University reform, and was carried into the Council, where the atmosphere often became uncomfortably hot. The situation was aggravated when Lord Syden-

ham thought fit on a notable occasion to silence his opponent by a rigid application of the 'time limit.' It was at a meeting of the Council held at Poona on the 25th July, 1911, that the incident took place. The annual Budget was under consideration, and the discussion had turned on the question of the powers of taxation of Provincial Councils. The Finance Member, Sir John Muir Mackenzie, had in the previous year strongly urged that the Council might be invested with the requisite power to impose the taxation necessary to meet its requirements, and that the dependence on the Imperial Government might be done away with altogether. That was the only way in which financial and administrative responsibility would be brought home to the Council and the people. As an abstract proposition, nothing could be more admirable, and Mr. (now Sir) Fazulbhoj Currimbhoj fell in love with it, and with "his usual corroborative vigour" supported it at the Budget meeting the year after. Pherozeshah, however, would have none of it. In his opinion, until the Council was so constituted as to represent the direct voice of the people, it was disastrous to invest it with any powers of taxation. He was not enamoured of 'non-official' members. They were sometimes more official than the officials themselves. The honourable member went on to say some very unpalatable home truths,

whereupon Lord Sydenham lost his patience and interposed: "Two minutes more, Sir Pheroze-shah." "Two minutes more!" indignantly exclaimed Pherozechah. Well then, he said, he could not use the precious moments better than by protesting against such an exercise of discretion vested in His Excellency under the rules. To give twenty minutes to a member for a general debate involving all the heads of the Budget was simply to stop his mouth. This protest was followed up by a long letter to the Press, of which the autocratic Governor took occasion to disapprove at the earliest opportunity.

On another occasion, when a Bill for amending the Improvement Trust Act was before the Council, Lord Sydenham ruled out of order an amendment moved by Pherozechah who, according to a newspaper comment of that time, "knew more about constitutional procedure than the whole box and dice of the Government of Bombay." When Pherozechah protested against this ruling in the columns of the local *Times*, the Secretary to the Council sent him an elaborate reply, which was also published in the Papers, refuting in detail the contentions of the honourable member, and expressing the regret of the President "that a member of the Legislative Council should have thought fit to ventilate in the Press his views as to the correctness of a ruling of the President, to whom the

rules give the sole authority to decide all points of order, and without whose consent no point of order may be discussed in Council." On the subject of the Bill for the registration of medical practitioners also, there was more than one passage-at-arms to relieve the dullness of the Council Chamber. The Governor, it must be admitted, happily hit off Pherozechah's attitude on the measure when he observed at the conclusion of the debate :—

"The Honourable Sir Pherozechah has attacked the Bill as a whole in one of his characteristically eloquent and vigorous speeches. He does not object to the clauses of it, but he objects to the whole thing. In this respect he reminds me of the soldier who, when brought before a court-martial, was asked if he objected to any of the members of it, and said that he objected to nobody, but to the whole business."

Despite these perpetual differences and constant struggle for mastery, there existed among the two men a feeling of mutual respect, each recognizing in the other a foeman worthy of his steel. It was characteristic of Pherozechah that when the Governor on the eve of his retirement was elevated to the peerage, he paid the latter a handsome tribute, remembering what he owed to himself and the Council as Leader of the Opposition. It was not the first time he showed



himself mindful of the amenities—which weaker men believing themselves stronger would call the hypocrisies—of public life, so often lost sight of in the dust and heat of political controversy.

With the retirement of Lord Sydenham and the advent of a Governor with liberal tendencies, Pherozeshah's power and influence revived, and he became once more the virtual dictator in public affairs that he had been for so many years. His prestige and popularity among the people had of course never been impaired. Whether out-voted in the Senate and the Council, or defeated on large questions of policy, his supremacy had always remained unchallenged. Opponents who fondly believed he was extinguished repeatedly found themselves disillusioned. A strong-headed ruler bent on shaping the administration after his own pattern had treated with somewhat scant respect his vast experience and unrivalled powers, and had sought to break his influence. But these efforts had failed to shake the hold of the dictator over the vast majority of his educated countrymen. With the advent of Lord Willingdon there came a change over the spirit of the Secretariat. The new Governor, brought up in the vivifying atmosphere of the House of Commons, had the sagacity to recognize in the formidable critic of Government a most valued asset, and showed himself anxious to seek his co-operation on every

occasion. Thus it came about that during the last two years of his long and varied career, Pherozeshah wielded an influence almost as great as was enjoyed by him in his palmiest days.

His activities during this period were astonishing, and his mind remained unclouded to the end. He spoke at public meetings with all his accustomed vigour, and there was no more vigilant critic in the Legislative Council. An instance of his mental acuteness will presently be referred to. Among his public utterances at this period must be recorded two notable pronouncements on the South African question delivered at public meetings held in Bombay in September and December, 1913. He declared he was one of those who had always stoutly maintained that there could be no justification for any part of the British Empire to deny to other parts the equal rights of citizenship. He had all along held that a subject of the Crown had a right of free entry and access to every part of the Empire. Englishmen had no justification for insisting on the policy of the open door in Asia, and the closed door in other parts of the world. On this fundamental issue, it may be noted, he was absolutely uncompromising. It was here he parted company with Mr. Gokhale and Mr. Gandhi, who, faced with an extremely difficult situation, had given in on the question of principle, and had contented themselves with obtaining whatever

terms they could exact from the Union Government to make the lot of the existing settlers more tolerable. Pherozeshah regarded this surrender as a cardinal mistake. He maintained that Indians could never give up the great and vital principle of Imperial citizenship. Time has brought about a striking vindication of Pherozeshah's point of view, on which such sharp differences of opinion existed at the moment, and has shown that in this as in many other things, his judgment was unrivalled, and his political instinct sure and unerring. The South African problem, in spite of all the twaddle about common sacrifices and brotherhood in arms to which we were treated while the German menace hung over the world, unfolds to-day the same old tale of injustice, arrogance and oppression, which have disgraced British Imperialism for a generation. Even the Smuts-Gandhi compromise seems to have gone by the board, and it is beginning to be realized that the Indian position would have been much stronger at the present moment, if the principle of equal citizenship had not been sacrificed to the urgent needs of the situation.

Among his last public appearances on the platform are two which stand out for different reasons. The first of these was at a meeting held in the Town Hall on the 13th August, 1914, to give expression to the feelings of deep loyalty and

patriotism which the war had so strikingly evoked among all classes of His Majesty's subjects. Pherozechah presided, and on rising to speak was received most enthusiastically by the vast audience which the occasion and his personality had brought together. His voice was weak and his words were few ; but it was one of the most effective speeches ever made by him. One particular sentiment lingered long in the memory of his countrymen, and was quoted again and again during the dark and anxious days through which the Empire passed, before it achieved through blood and tears the triumph of a noble and righteous cause :—

“ Often have we met in this historic hall to speak of our rights, our charters and our privileges. At this solemn moment, we can only remember that we owe sacred duties and holy obligations to that British Rule under whose auspices the lofty destinies of this great and magnificent land are being moulded for over a century, and under whose wise and provident and righteous statesmanship, the welfare, happiness and prosperity of the country are being incessantly promoted.”

The speaker reminded his audience that at that supreme moment they had all merged in one general and universal denomination—the proud denomination of loyal and devoted subjects of the British Crown. As such they had met together

to lay at the feet of their august Sovereign their unswerving fealty, unshaken allegiance and enthusiastic homage. It was, to use the language of a newspaper report, "a great resolve expressed in noble words. It found an echo in every speaker who followed; it was greeted with unparalleled enthusiasm by the audience which crowded the historic Town Hall." Pherozeshah harped on the same theme a year later, when in conveying his regret at his inability to attend the 15th Bombay Provincial Conference which was to be held at Poona in July, 1915, he hoped that all political controversies would be hushed for the moment, and that the Conference would deem it its greatest function to proclaim solemnly and emphatically the loyalty and devotion of the Province to the British Crown, and to remember the sacred obligation of India to that great empire of which she was growing more and more an integral portion.

Equally solemn, but in a different sense, was the occasion on which Pherozeshah stood for what proved to be the last time on the Town Hall platform, trying to give expression in a broken voice to his sorrow at the death of a most valued friend and colleague. The fell disease against which Gokhale had struggled manfully for years at length cut him off in the prime of life when the country most needed him. He died

while engaged in the solution of the momentous problems that confronted India at one of the turning-points in her history. It was a loss to the Empire which it could ill-afford to bear at a time when real statesmanship was needed more than ever, if a new order of things was to be evolved, making the world brighter and better.

To Indians of all shades of opinion, the passing away of Gokhale seemed to be nothing short of a national calamity. From every quarter came expressions of genuine grief at the premature termination of a great and noble career. Bombay gave fitting expression to her sense of loss at a vast and impressive gathering in the Town Hall on the 5th March, 1915. Lord Willingdon was in the chair, and in his singularly felicitous vein paid a tribute to the illustrious dead, worthy of the occasion and the man. When Pherozezshah rose to speak, looking forlorn and ill, with, as it appeared to many, the shadow of death hanging over him, the pathos of the situation struck the audience, and evoked a sympathetic chord in every heart. He spoke in a voice broken by emotion—the fire seemed to have vanished from tone and gesture—and sounded a personal note, which fitted in with the mood of the hour. He expressed his inability to do justice to the noble life and brilliant career of that eminent Servant of India whose death they had met to mourn :—

“ Even if I attempted to make a long speech, I feel I could not have spoken connectedly and coherently for the reason that I feel so sad, so depressed, so forsaken, advancing as I am in years, on seeing valued and beloved colleague after colleague dropping away from my side. Telang has been gathered to his fathers, Ranade is no more amongst us, Budrudin has passed away, our beloved Gokhale alas ! has now closed his eyes for ever and for ever, and many others whom I could name, are leaving me one after another, forsaken and desolate. I feel almost alone in the stupendous work for the country which is still pending before us.”

The speaker could not but recall with a keen sense of regret what plans Gokhale had laid down, what hopes he had entertained, what work he had chalked out for himself for the development and advancement of the country which he had loved so dearly. Without his help, guidance and co-operation, Pherozeshah continued, he did not know how to persevere with the task which they had set before themselves. The speech was full of pathos and charged with deep emotion, and its conclusion was greeted with “ loud and continued cheers in which Lady Willingdon joined, clasping the speaker’s hands and congratulating

him on his splendid utterance." The audience noted that for the moment the commanding tone and the compelling look had vanished, and it was touched by the note of loneliness struck in every line of the speech. Pherozeshah's moving tribute gave an emphatic denial to the stories current about the antagonism which silly gossip credited him with feeling at the appearance of a rival near the throne. It would be idle to deny that acute differences had arisen between them on certain occasions, notably on the South African question, on which they held radically divergent views. But these differences were never allowed to affect their mutual regard and friendship. Indeed, even if Pherozeshah was inclined to resent particular actions of his disciple, the deep respect invariably shown to him by Mr. Gokhale was sufficient to disarm any man. To the last, the latter maintained a close and intimate touch with his leader, with whom he had long and protracted discussions on several questions of vital importance, which engaged his attention in the closing days of his singularly fruitful career. The report of the Public Services Commission was then under discussion; the union of the two parties within the Congress was being debated, and Mr. Gokhale had conceived the idea, while in London in the Autumn of 1914, of drawing up a scheme of reforms in consultation with the Aga Khan and Pherozeshah, and



submitting it to Government after it had been approved by the Congress and the Moslem League. On many of the momentous issues arising out of these questions, the two leaders were more or less in complete agreement. Considerable cordiality marked their last meeting which took place at Pherozeshah's residence in Bombay, when they had a long discussion. The writer happened to be present, and was struck by the warmth of friendly feeling with which the two men greeted each other. They were to meet again in company with the Aga Khan to discuss the all-important question of the reforms. Perhaps, the very last letter which Mr. Gokhale wrote was addressed to Pherozeshah, and related to the scheme which was uppermost in his thoughts and to which a passing reference must be made in this place. There was a difference of opinion between them on a fundamental point in the scheme. Mr. Gokhale favoured the idea of the German, Austrian and American system of an independent and powerful executive, irresponsible to the Legislature on the one hand, and on the other, a large and powerful Legislature directly elected by the people. Pherozeshah was for development on the historical lines of the British constitution, and strongly favoured a system of responsibility through the Legislature. These conflicting views were never threshed out by the three leaders at a joint conference such as they intended holding, and

when the Aga Khan saw Mr. Gokhale at Poona, the latter realizing that his end was near, said he would draw up a scheme embodying his own ideas, and would leave it behind him as his last will and testament. This was done, and the Aga Khan received a copy a few days after, as also did Pherozeshah. But the scheme on which the dying statesman had set his heart went no further, for Pherozeshah could not overcome his objection to its central idea, and the war which was expected to be over by the end of 1915 continued to lengthen its shadow over the face of the earth. Ultimately, when the Aga Khan published the political testament of his friend, perhaps, as a corrective to the wild ideas which were seizing the minds of people, things had changed a great deal. India had taken vast strides, and a scheme which might ordinarily have satisfied the aspirations of her sons for a generation came to be regarded as timid and halting, and out of place in a new-born world throbbing with strange hopes and ambitions.

Pherozeshah's activities on the platform and in the Council were not to put a seal on his long and varied career. He had the good fortune of achieving towards the end of his life two objects which were, perhaps, nearer his heart than any other. One of them was the foundation of a daily paper pledged to carry out of the policy of his party. It was the fruition of efforts which

had gone on in one shape or another for nearly a quarter of a century. It was no secret that an up-to-date English newspaper run on Liberal lines was the crowning ambition of his career. *The Advocate of India* had years before been the medium through which Pherozeshah had attempted to carry on his political propaganda, and he had assisted the paper and its editor substantially. The arrangement, however, had soon fallen through, and when the *Gazette* and the *Advocate* went over to the enemy, Bombay had to listen to the voice of the three English dailies chiming in unison and silencing every other note. At the time of the Caucus, when *The Times of India* was conducting an infamous campaign against the 'Boss,' it was felt as a serious disadvantage that there was no English daily to counteract its mischievous propaganda. A movement was thereafter set on foot to boycott the *Times*, and to provide Bombay with an organ of Congress opinion. But in those days patriots as a rule were not very willing to put their hands in their pockets, and the project languished for want of the requisite capital. Later on, negotiations were conducted for the purchase of the *Bombay Gazette*, which, however, came to nothing, owing to the opposition of one or two of the Directors of that paper, who did not want it to go into the hands of a party with which they had no sympathy.

Ultimately, Pherozeshah and his friends succeeded in launching a new journal into existence, and *The Bombay Chronicle* saw the light of day in April, 1913. Edited by an exceptionally able writer, it soon became a power in the land. The firm direction exercised over its policy by Pherozeshah as Chairman of the Board, while it added weight and dignity to its expression of opinion, prevented it from straying into wild and dangerous paths. Within a very short time, it began to exercise an enormous influence over public affairs, and more than fulfilled the fond hopes of its promoters. Pherozeshah's interest in the career of his pet child was intense, and his control of its management and policy entailed an amount of trouble and anxiety which told greatly on his health. But he cheerfully bore the burden, happy in the knowledge that he had at length provided Bombay with a paper which mercilessly attacked cant, injustice and hypocrisy wherever it found them, and which constituted itself into a sort of a terror to those in authority. When his strong hand was removed, the paper which he had done so much to create, threatened at one time to break loose from the principles he had laid down, and to be engulfed in the wave of militant nationalism which swept over the land during the great world-struggle for liberty and self-determination. It has since recovered itself

to a great extent, but one's appreciation of the ability and fearlessness with which it is conducted need not obscure the fact that it is pursuing a policy which its founder would hardly have approved of or tolerated.

To add to the anxieties consequent upon the foundation of *The Bombay Chronicle*, a financial crisis of a particularly severe character overtook Bombay in 1913, and for reasons to be presently stated, caused Pherozeshah no little uneasiness. The collapse of the Credit and the Indian Specie banks, induced by colossal gambling operations, threw the money market into a state of wild confusion and panic, and threatened to involve even well-managed concerns in one vast ruin. It was a period of tribulation for Bombay, and gave a set-back to *swadeshi* enterprise, from which it was feared it would not recover for a generation.

The Central Bank of India, which Pherozeshah had helped to found at the end of 1911, suffered with the rest. Ably managed as it was by Mr. S. N. Pochkhanawala, the young banker who was directing its operations, there commenced a steady and continuous run on its deposits, which dwindled at an alarming rate. The position caused no little anxiety to Pherozeshah as Chairman of the Board of Directors. His name had inspired confidence in the public, and had materially contributed to the successful flotation of the Bank.

It was due to his insistence that the Articles had been changed so as to give stricter control over the Manager to the Directors of the Bank in the interests of the shareholders. The safety of the storm-tossed bark was, therefore, a matter of anxious concern to him. He was so keen on saving it from being submerged beneath the wave of panic which swept over Bombay, that he went the length of offering to deposit the title-deeds of his various properties for the purpose of raising monies for financing the Bank. The example thus set was followed by other Directors, and put heart into the management. But the sacrifice was not needed, for the brave little craft successfully weathered the storm, and entered a safe haven. Its subsequent brilliant career would have delighted none more than its first Chairman, who had all his life been as staunch an advocate of indigenous enterprise as he was of an indigenous system of Government.

A bust of Pherozeshah adorns the Central Bank, and arrests the eye as one enters the premises. It was unveiled at a general meeting of the shareholders held on the 27th February, 1918. Eloquent tributes were paid on the occasion to Pherozeshah's keen solicitude for the welfare of the Bank, his firm and sagacious guidance of its operations, his unconquerable faith in the success of genuine *swadeshi* enterprise conducted with honesty, and last

but not least, the strength and prestige which his association gave to the Bank, particularly during the dark days of 1913. If to-day the Bank ranks among the most successful examples of purely Indian enterprise, it is due not a little to the policy and personality of its first Chairman.

Yet another matter for satisfaction was Pherozeshah's appointment as Vice-Chancellor of the University in March, 1915. His connection with the institution dated back to the period, when on his return to Bombay after being called to the Bar, he was appointed a Fellow by Sir Alexander Grant, who was then Vice-Chancellor. During the long period that had elapsed, he had served the University with a devotion second only, perhaps, to that which he had shown to the Corporation. There was no greater champion of the cause of Higher Education, which he always regarded with an extremely jealous eye. To the University, as the centre of learning, he bore an attachment, which made him averse to any violent changes, or interference with its rights and privileges. For years he fought with energy and determination the new-fangled ideas, which sought to establish that the whole of our educational system was a mistake which required to be immediately rectified. In the Senate and the Syndicate, he resolutely stood up for the old order of things, with such modifications as time and circumstances demanded.

That Pherozeshah rendered the University distinguished services, in spite of a certain conservatism of outlook, cannot be gainsaid. And yet, they remained without any practical recognition till very nearly the close of his long career. Other universities in other countries would have delighted to honour a man with a record such as his. Lord Sydenham, indeed, in his earlier days felt the reproach, and would have liked to have appointed Pherozeshah as Vice-Chancellor, provided he was agreeable to chiming in with the views of the Governor on educational reforms. But Pherozeshah was unbending, and the idea was dropped. It was to the infinite credit of Lord Willingdon that he seized the earliest opportunity of putting at the head of the University administration one who, though he could not be regarded as an educationist, was undoubtedly the ablest man in the Senate. The Bombay correspondent of the *Capital* thus traced the genesis of the appointment :—

“ When Lord Hardinge last visited Bombay,\* he had a long private interview with Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, and I am told that one result of the pourparlers was the consent of the Parsi Knight to become Vice-Chancellor of the Bombay University, if the post were offered him by Lord Willingdon, the Chancellor. The Viceroy subse-



quently convinced the Governor of the expediency of a measure that startled certain doves, which had no idea that Sir John Heaton would resign after a short reign of two and a half years.” .

The appointment was made in March, 1915, and gave widespread satisfaction. *The Times of India* wrote :—

“ Sir Pherozeshah Mehta has taken a leading part in the life of the University for very many years, and has always stood up in defence of the rights and privileges of that institution. In doing so, he has been a leader in most of the contentious discussions of the past. He has never attempted to disguise his opinions, and for many years he has been looked upon as the accepted champion of a big party on the Senate. With many men this would have been a serious obstacle in the way of a successful career as a Vice-Chancellor, but we do not think it will be so in the case of Sir Pherozeshah. He will be the guardian of the University against any attack from within, and we shall be sorry for anybody who dares to underrate the strength of the University, or tries to hold it in contempt while he is in office. But in presiding over the deliberations of the

Senate, we believe that Sir Pherozeshah will be rigid in his impartiality, and that being so, his influence for good should be enormous."

Other papers were equally appreciative, and the term of office of the new Vice-Chancellor was looked forward to with considerable interest. There was bitter disappointment in store for all, for none more than for Pherozeshah himself. His health was fast growing worse, and he found himself unable to discharge the duties of his office. He could not preside over the deliberations of the Senate, nor gratify the anxious desire of a public, eager to know what he had to say from his place as Vice-Chancellor of the problems of higher education. His Convocation address would certainly have proved a remarkable utterance, as unlike the pronouncements of his predecessors in office as one could expect in a man so greatly different from his contemporaries. But it was willed otherwise, and the helplessness of the situation preyed deeply on his mind. He once told the writer how keenly he regretted his inability to grasp the unique opportunities which had at length come his way as the administrative head of the University, and how this sense of helplessness was affecting his health and spirits. The appointment had come too late, he exclaimed with a tinge of sadness in his voice, and as the writer listened to him, he

realized to some extent the depth and sincerity of his love for the cause of Education, to which he had devoted the best that was in him, and in whose service he had encountered some of the greatest difficulties and disappointments of his career.

Pherozechah's disabilities were purely physical. He suffered from his old kidney trouble, and his heart was affected. The latter symptom caused his friends a good deal of anxiety. On one occasion, while addressing the Corporation, he stopped suddenly, and for a few moments appeared to be breathing with difficulty. Medical assistance was immediately available, but it was not wanted, for, to the intense relief of those around him, he began to revive after he had swallowed something which he kept in his pocket for emergency. As time went on, these attacks became more frequent, and caused considerable apprehension among his friends.

Though Pherozechah's health was broken down, his mind remained unclouded to the end. His perception was as keen as ever, and his indomitable spirit never left him. The traits that distinguished him were never, for instance, exhibited to better advantage than when he opposed the Town Survey Bill introduced in the Bombay Council in December, 1914. To all intents and purposes, it appeared to be an excellent little measure, providing for a much-needed survey of the Town and Island of Bombay. It contained, how-

ever, an innocent-looking clause, authorizing the maintenance of a Register of Possession showing the titles of individual holdings. Pherozechah's keen intellect detected in this provision a somewhat dangerous power of inquisition into the titles of private properties, and he strongly opposed it both in the Corporation, to which the Bill had been referred for opinion, and in the Legislative Council. He refused to believe that the Register of Possession was anything but an instrument of oppression, and he reminded the Council how in 1904, a similarly innocent-looking clause was sought to be smuggled into a measure professed to be based on the English Motors Act, and which had to be abandoned on his convincing Lord Lamington of its real character. The point raised by Pherozechah had escaped everybody else, and a great many people thought he was drawing on his imagination, and tilting at a windmill. But not all the plausible explanations of the sponsors of the Bill could move him from the position he had taken up, and he had at length the satisfaction of carrying the public with him in his agitation against the measure. It was a little incident which showed in all their power and plenitude the characteristics which had made the man supreme among his fellows.

It has already been remarked that the closing days of Pherozechah's life were in a sense among the happiest. He was weary of conflict and anxious

to co-operate, and he found in the changing spirit of the times, and in the advent of a Governor with liberal ideas, opportunities for which he had long sought in vain. Events had happened, too, which could not but afford him genuine satisfaction. He had been able to promote a Bank, a genuine *swadeshi* enterprise, which had weathered the storm, and now stood four square to all the winds that blow. He had founded a paper which had speedily become a power in the land. He had become the administrative head of the University which he had served with distinction for more than a generation.

That was not all. Two notable events which took place in March and July of 1915 were to gladden still further the gathering twilight of a long and dazzling career. The Corporation which was largely his creation celebrated its Golden Jubilee on the 2nd March, and it was a matter of infinite satisfaction to Pherozeshah that he had lived to see the day, and to be present at the banquet held in honour of the event. The brilliant gathering which assembled on the occasion received with enthusiasm the graceful reference made to him by the President, Sir Fazulbhoy Currimbhoy :—

“ Of the great heroes of our municipal history, one is here to-night, Sir Pherozeshah, still full of fight and vigour, a kind of

perpetual reminder to us that service to one's city and country is the most honourable of all things."

As Pherozechah rose to propose the toast of the President, he met with a reception the cordiality of which could not have failed to touch him. It was in that very Hall that he had fought the bitterest fights, and won the greatest triumphs of his career. He had made many enemies : he had estranged some friends. In the minds of those present, however, there was but one predominant thought, and that was the immensity of the debt which the City and the Corporation owed to him. The speech was in his best after-dinner manner. The Governor, who was present on the occasion, had spoken of the brake often applied by the members to the progressive policy of the municipal executive. Pherozechah in his happiest vein promptly replied to the charge, and pointed out that if the commissioners were liberal, it was, because they put their hands in other people's pockets, while the poor Corporation had to put its hands in its own! His Excellency, he added, had drawn an imaginary picture. It was only by close co-operation between the commissioners and the councillors that the progress and development of Bombay had been rendered possible. This generous praise of his colleagues and the executive did not, however, prevent the audience from realizing that the old

and war-worn leader had done more than all the commissioners and councillors put together to make the municipal administration of Bombay a model to the whole of India. Carlyle has said that all history is biography. While in its general application this view represents but a half truth, it may safely be said that the history of the Bombay Corporation during the first fifty years of its eventful career is largely the biography of Pherozeshah Mehta.

In July, the Bombay University decided to confer on Pherozeshah the degree of Doctor of Laws, an honour which it had very sparingly and grudgingly bestowed in the past. The proposition was moved in the Syndicate by Sir Narayan Chandavarkar, and referred to Pherozeshah's "scholarship and his eminent public services ranging over a period of nearly 50 years, especially in respect of measures affecting the cause of local self-government, sanitation and education." Pherozeshah wrote from Deolali accepting the honour and tendering his thanks to the Senate. His venerable *guru* Dadabhai Naoroji was to be similarly honoured. It was a graceful, if very belated, recognition of the life-long labours of Pherozeshah in the field of education. Though not in any sense a man of profound scholarship, he had rendered the University meritorious services, and in at length recognizing them, the University

showed an appreciation which it had unfortunately taken too long to decide on. The degree was never conferred. When the resolution was passed in the Senate, the shadow of death was already hanging over Pherozeshah, and he passed away before the honour was actually bestowed.

While there was so much to be thankful for in the final stages of the long journey that was fast drawing to a close, there was a question before the country of considerable importance which greatly exercised Pherozeshah's mind, and in the settlement of which he would have undoubtedly taken a notable part, had his life been spared. It was the old question of the fusion of the Moderates and the Extremists. For some time past, a few leaders on either side had been actively endeavouring to find a common platform. After seven years of wandering in the wilderness, the Extremists were desperately anxious to return to the fold. As Pherozeshah and others had foreseen, they had speedily discovered that so long as they were kept outside the Congress, their influence over the country was greatly circumscribed. They had made frequent attempts at re-union, and suggested various ingenious compromises. But the firmness and sagacity of some of the leaders of the Congress, particularly in Bombay, had succeeded in keeping them at arm's length.

Latterly, however, a desire had manifested



itself to make up the differences and close the ranks, and Mr. Gokhale, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and others had shown themselves anxious to facilitate the admission of their opponents on terms which would be acceptable to them, and which would ensure at the same time the integrity of the Congress. By Article XX of the Congress Constitution, the right of electing delegates was strictly limited to certain recognized associations and public bodies. No one who did not subscribe to the Creed, and was not elected by such bodies directly or at public meetings convened by them, could find admission as a delegate. The compromise favoured by Mr. Gokhale was that all associations which accepted the Creed of the Congress, whether they were affiliated or not, should have the right of election, either at their own meetings or at public meetings held under their auspices. He was influenced by the thought that the Extremists were beginning to see things from a new angle of vision, and that a genuine *rapprochement* was possible. As he observed in a letter to Mr. Bhupendranath Basu written from Poona on the 14th December, 1914, a fortnight before the Madras Congress :—

“ When Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and I and others urged at Calcutta three years ago that the right of electing delegates should be restored to public meetings,

held under auspices which guaranteed the acceptance of Article 9 by those who took part in the meetings, we were under the impression that our Extremist friends in the different provinces had by that time seen the error of their ways and had come to realize that the only political work possible in the existing circumstances of the country was on the lines of the Congress ; that they wanted quietly to return to the Congress fold, but that considerations of self-respect stood in their way, as they did not like to apply for election to those whom they considered to be their opponents ; and that it was therefore desirable to so relax the rigidity of our rules as to make it less humiliating to these countrymen of ours to rejoin the Congress. We were also swayed in our attitude by the extreme desirability of taking an early opportunity to heal the breach in public life that had resulted from the split of 1907, so that the rising generation of the country should not have to grow up under the baleful tradition of that breach. And this was really my view of the matter till last week, and I was prepared to do what lay in my power to bring opinion round to it in the Congress, short, of course, of

breaking with those whose lead I have followed or with whom I have worked all these years.”

Before the Congress met at Madras in 1914, Mrs. Besant and several others came down to discuss matters with Mr. Gokhale. Negotiations with Mr. Tilak's party went on at the same time, and there was a talk of a Round Table Conference between the Extremists and the Moderates. All this while, Pherozeshah kept himself aloof, and disapproved of Mr. Gokhale's talks with the leaders on the other side. More than ever he felt convinced of the undesirability of union with a party whose policy he condemned, and whose methods he distrusted. Justification of his attitude was not long in coming. In a letter to Mr. Bhupendranath Basu, written a fortnight before the Madras Congress, Mr. Gokhale had to confess to a bitter sense of disillusionment :—

“ My hope was that if we enabled the seceders by such relaxations to come in, they would, having seen the impossibility of political action on any other lines, co-operate with us in furthering the programme of the Congress by present methods. That hope, however, has now been shattered. Mr. Tilak has told Mr. Subba Rao frankly and in unequivocal terms that though he accepts the position laid down in

what is known as the Congress Creed, *viz.*, that the aim of the Congress is the attainment by India of self-government within the empire by constitutional means, he does not believe in the present methods of the Congress, which rest on association with Government where possible, and opposition to it where necessary. In place of these he wants to substitute the method of opposition to Government pure and simple within constitutional limits—in other words a policy of Irish obstruction. We on our side are agitating for a larger and larger share in the government of the country—in the Legislative Councils, on Municipal and Local Boards, in public services and so forth. Mr. Tilak wants to address only one demand to the Government here and to the British public in England, *viz.*, for the concession of self-government to India, and till that is conceded, he would urge his countrymen to have nothing to do with either the public services or Legislative Councils and Local and Municipal Bodies. And by organizing obstruction to Government in every possible direction within the limits of the laws of the land, he hopes to be able to bring the administration to a standstill, and compel the authorities

to capitulate. This is briefly his programme, and he says that he wants to work for its realization through the Congress if he and his followers are enabled to rejoin it, or failing this, by starting a new organization to be called the National League.” •

This frank statement of his policy Mr. Tilak supplemented by explaining that his purpose in seeking re-admission into the Congress fold was to strive for effecting such changes in the rules as would throw open election as delegate practically to everybody, as before 1907, and then for getting the Congress to endorse his programme by securing at its sessions the attendance of a majority of delegates of his way of thinking. To Pherozeshah, with his unerring judgment on men and measures, this exposition of the aims of the Nationalist leaders did not come as a surprise. He had throughout kept them at arm's length, uninfluenced by any sentimental considerations in favour of a united Congress. And he was determined that so long as matters rested with him he would save the Congress from being captured by the other side.

It was a critical period in India's history. Her partnership with the allied nations in the great world-struggle for freedom that was taking place on the blood-stained fields of France had established her claim to a place in the Commonwealth such as she had not conjured up in her wildest dreams. It

had given her demands strength and reality, and had lifted her demand for self-government into the regions of practical politics. At such a time, it was matter of supreme importance that the direction of the Congress should be in firm and sagacious hands, and Pherozeshah had accordingly given a mandate to two or three of his friends to arrange for the 1915 Session being held in Bombay, where he could control every phase of the movement. It was also essential that the national demands should be voiced by some spokesman, who could not only command the confidence of his countrymen, but could compel a hearing also from those in authority. Such a man was Sir Satyendra Sinha, now Lord Sinha of Raipur, ex-Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, and a man widely respected for his character and capacity. Pherozeshah felt that a better choice could not be made, and while everybody wondered at the selection of a man whose political record was insignificant, Pherozeshah had no doubts in the matter. He had invited the Congress of 1915 to Bombay, and he was determined to see that the conduct of its affairs should be in safe hands. So the invitation went out to Sir Satyendra. He declined at first; Pherozeshah wired "You dare not refuse," and the ex-Law Member had to yield. The rest is a matter of history. The President's pronouncement was characterized by a weight and dignity all its own, and was an able

exposition of the aims and methods of the political school to which he belonged. The most notable feature of it, which, however, did not receive much attention at the time, was its demand for a declaration of policy on the part of His Majesty's Government. In the light of subsequent events, one may well wonder whence the Bengali lawyer derived the inspiration of that remarkable idea.

The Bombay Congress of 1915, to go on with the narrative, proved memorable in that it brought about the union of the two parties whom Surat had set adrift. When Mrs. Besant's proposals for the amendment of the constitution were referred by the Madras Congress to a committee, Pherozeshah had decided, as we have seen, on having the next session in Bombay. He was anxious to put an end once and for all to the manoeuvres which had been going on for some years to effect a compromise which he regarded as mischievous, and he was confident that his personality and his immense influence in Bombay would carry everything before them. With his passing away a few weeks before the holding of the session, the way was made smooth for the amendment of the constitution, and the Nationalists walked in. Their triumph was speedy and complete. When the next split took place, it was the Moderates who had to walk out. How far the history of these times would have been differently written, if the old lion

had been alive, it would be idle to speculate. It is significant, however, that the union should have come about only when the strong purpose, the clear vision and the unbending will which had so long stood between the two contending factions were no more. With the passing away of Pherozeshah, the party he had so long led disappeared as a political force, and militant nationalism stepped forward, and raised a battle-cry, which swept the country off its feet, and drowned the voice of reason and moderation.

It was at such a momentous period in the history of India, and while his hand was still on the pulse of civic and national life that Pherozeshah passed away. Unlike many other great men, it was his good fortune not to lag superfluous on the stage, and he died while his intellect was unclouded, and his influence over his countrymen as dominant as ever.

The first symptoms of a definite break-down were noticed in June, 1914, when his heart began to give trouble. His connection with the Central Bank at a time when it was passing through a severe financial crisis, and the close personal supervision he exercised over the conduct of *The Bombay Chronicle*, which he regarded as the last achievement of his career, had added greatly to the burden on his overladen shoulders, and told heavily on his system. Physically a nervous man, Pherozeshah shrank from an examination by some specialist, and treated



the complaint with various nostrums suggested to him from time to time. A friend's recommendation had succeeded in inducing even an application of Oriental Balm ! Gladstone once said of Bright that "he did nothing he should do to preserve his health, and everything he should not." That was in a sense true of Pherozeshah as well. He was extremely careful in his habits, and sometimes absurdly punctilious.\* And yet, when things went wrong, no man so trifled with his health as he.

After keeping out of Bombay for practically the latter half of 1914, he returned to the City in the January of the following year, very little better for the comparative rest he had enjoyed for six long months. The death of Gokhale within a few weeks after his return caused him a great shock, and kept him very depressed. In April he went to Matheran, and stayed there a couple of months. About this time, the old kidney trouble attacked him again, and caused him acute pain. On examination, he was found to be suffering from a cancerous tumour, and it was evident that the end was slowly approaching.

The next few months were spent between Deolali and Poona. The only time he was in Bombay was for a couple of days in August, when he came down to attend the Convocation of the University. It was to be his first public appearance as Vice-

Chancellor, and large numbers of people went to the Hall to see him. To the keen disappointment of everybody, Pherozeshah failed to put in an appearance. He had come down specially to attend the function, and it had been arranged that he was to take perfect rest, and to reserve himself for the occasion. Unfortunately, he took it into his head a day previous to go to a meeting of the Corporation. He was unequal to the strain, and he spent that night in pain and restlessness, which made attendance at the Convocation impossible.

Even in those days, his mind was as active as ever, and though it was not possible to maintain a personal touch with everything that was going on, in matters of importance nothing could be done without consulting him. None ventured to think he was a dying force. As a matter of fact, he was looking forward to the approaching session of the Congress at Bombay, where he hoped firmly and finally to establish the principles for which he had always stood. While in Poona, he had sought an interview with Lord Willingdon to fix up the site for the Congress, and the latter had very courteously acceded to his request to be spared the journey to Government House at Ganeshkhind, and had discussed matters at the Council Hall. This was, perhaps, the last active effort of the fast-dying leader. His condition speedily grew

worse, and he finally returned to Bombay on the 24th October. The Sunday after his return, he held his usual levee, and saw numbers of his friends at his place. That was the last they saw of him. His strength rapidly declined, and though he moved about the house, and pursued with regularity his daily habits, and did not neglect even his elaborate toilet, he shut himself in and received no one. He never discussed his trouble, not even with the devoted wife who looked after him with unremitting care. Though he kept somewhat depressed and silent, no note of sadness or despair escaped him. The fortitude which he displayed in these last few days extorted the admiration of the eminent surgeon who attended him in his final illness.

On the fateful morning of the 5th November, Pherozeshah rose as usual, took his coffee, and read his papers and correspondence. The doctors came at about 10 in the morning, examined him and found nothing very unusual. Shortly after they had left, he was seen standing near the bed, seized with a spasm of the heart. He said not a word to those who rushed to his assistance, but quietly allowed himself to be moved into the bed. Dr. Masina, who was one of the doctors attending him, was immediately sent for and arrived at the bed-side within a few minutes. He spoke to the dying man, who answered him with an effort. Some brandy was administered, but it had no effect.

A few moments later, without a struggle or a sigh, Pherozeshah breathed his last.

The news spread like wild-fire through the City. Though the end was not unexpected, it came as a shock to most people when it did arrive. It was hard to believe that that towering figure which had dominated the stage for more than a generation was no more. As *The Times of India* observed, the last impressions of Pherozeshah's public activities were those of such a vigorous personality, and the place which he filled was so large that his death was a great shock. As the extras issued by the papers and the telephone wires spread the news in every corner, the City became enveloped in gloom. "Pherozeshah is dead" was the cry on everyone's lips, and though it was too early to realize the magnitude of the loss, it was felt everywhere that a giant among his fellows had passed away.

Public grief over the event was profound and universal. The Municipal and University offices were at once closed, as were a great many other institutions representing a variety of interests. Almost from the moment the news became known, a continual stream of visitors called at the residence at Nepean Sea Road to express condolence with Lady Mehta and the family, and to have a last look at the features of the great leader. Most of those who had loyally followed him through life

were there, many deeply and visibly affected. His life-long friend and colleague, Dinshaw Wacha, who was among the earliest to call, broke down with emotion, and while leaving had to be assisted down the stairs.

The funeral was most impressive, being largely attended by men representing every class of the cosmopolitan population of Bombay. Lord Willingdon was represented by one of the Secretaries to Government. Everyone in that vast gathering looked grave and subdued, as if in the presence of a great calamity. As the funeral procession emerged from the house, people who had gathered outside bowed their heads, and paid their last respects to the departed leader. The cortege slowly wended its way, followed by an immense crowd, to the Towers of Silence, and as it came to the spot beyond which none but Parsis are allowed to go, Sir Narayan Chandavarkar addressed those present, and paid a very warm and feeling tribute to the memory of his friend. Mr. Wacha attempted to follow him, but his feelings overcame him, and he could not utter a word. Amidst such manifestations of sorrow, personal and public, the mortal remains of Pherozechah were consigned to the Towers where eternal silence dwells.

In the days which followed, from a hundred platforms and from the Press all over the country,

attempts were made to give adequate expression to the national sense of loss at the passing away of the most powerful and inspiring personality in the public life of India. Papers and politicians of all shades of opinion bore testimony to the personal magnetism and the great gifts of speech and intellect which had given Pherozeshah the commanding position he had so long enjoyed in the affairs of the nation. *The Statesman*, *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *The Englishman*, Mr. Tilak and Mrs. Besant were almost as appreciative as the most loyal adherents of the political creed of the departed leader. *The Bengalee*, more partial than most of its Calcutta contemporaries, but with the detachment of a critic who did not always see eye to eye with Pherozeshah, wrote that a prince and a great man had fallen, and a nation was in mourning.

Among memorial meetings, the one held in London at Caxton Hall on the 10th December deserves a passing notice on account of its cosmopolitan character. Englishmen and Indians of all shades of political opinion, including men like Lord Harris, Mr. Ameer Ali, Sir M. M. Bhowmuggree and Mr. Lovat Fraser, united to do honour to the memory of Pherozeshah. The Aga Khan presided, and touched on the key-note of his friend's career when he referred to "that great patriot's firm hold, amid all mutations, of the need for the maintenance of the

British connection with India as an essential condition of the march to Indian nationhood and ultimate self-government within the empire." Lord Harris, who moved the principal resolution, observed that they had been keen opponents on many public questions, but he could say that while Pherozeshah was "a most resolute fighter, keen in argument and firm in adhering to his principles, he was as fair a fighter as he had ever met, either in England or India."

It was in Bombay, however, where for over a generation he had exercised a dominant influence over her many-sided activities that a full sense of the magnitude of the loss was actively realized. It was felt as if a great beacon-light had gone out, leaving darkness and confusion behind. It was impossible to visualise the public life of Bombay without the towering figure of the man who had dominated it at every point. For more years than one cared to recall, there had hardly been a movement of any importance which had either not been initiated, guided or controlled by him. And Bombay had been supremely happy in the possession of her 'Boss.' Through his own personality and achievements, he had raised her status and importance, and secured her a pride of place in the country. Though regarded as an autocrat, the immense power he wielded had been exercised on the whole with remarkable restraint and judgment.

It was, therefore, with a feeling akin to dismay that Bombay learnt that her "uncrowned king" was no more. It was as if every department of her activities had lost a leader who was indispensable to its progress, and who could not be replaced. And yet, the full import of the tragedy could not be borne in at the moment of its occurrence. As *The Bombay Chronicle* observed:—

"The time indeed is not yet when we can adequately appreciate it. As the years go on, and we miss his guiding presence, his eagle-eyed watchfulness over the public interest, his fearless lead in the civic or political arena, his commanding personality and the healthy liberal atmosphere which he brought into every discussion or controversy, we shall look back to the days when he was among us and realize, perhaps, in its just measure, all that he did for his city, for his country, for the empire."

It is easy to exaggerate the virtues of the dead. Too often we find justified the witty adaptation of the old tag, *de mortuis nihil nisi bunkum*. In the case of Pherozeshah, however, the difficulty was to find words which would adequately describe his career and personality. During his life-time, there had been numerous occasions on which attempts had been made in the Press and on the platform to sum up the attributes which marked



him out as a pre-eminent leader of men. There was no man about whom more had been written and said. He was one of those rare individuals about whom the world constantly talks. If his lot had been cast in England, few men would have figured so largely in the cartoons of the day. His dress, his habits, his commanding presence and his masterful manner compelled attention, apart from his remarkable powers, and fixed the public gaze constantly on his personality. And yet, people felt when they spoke of him that in spite of all their enthusiastic and even effusive tributes, they had failed to grasp the secret of his wonderful mastery over men and affairs. The magnetism of his personality could not be described in precise and definite terms.

The tributes which flowed from all over the country when Pherozeshah passed away, might, therefore, appear to a hypercritical mind to be singularly feeble in most cases, in spite of their effusiveness. *The Times of India* rose, however, splendidly to the occasion, and the remarkable homage it paid to the memory of the man whom its own columns had fiercely assailed on numerous occasions, will linger long in the minds of those who cherish the memory of Pherozeshah Mehta. It spoke of his great services to the people in many fields of activity, of the courage and resource with which he handled the affairs of the

country in the critical days which followed the debacle at Surat, of the spirit with which he fought, which reminded one of the best traits of English public life, of his unconquerable optimism and his unshakeable faith, amidst much wringing of hands, in the blessings of the British connection, which he regarded as providential. It was, however, as "a great Bombay citizen" that Pherozeshah would be best and longest remembered :—

"In his devotion to Bombay he was, we think we may say without exaggeration, the greatest citizen any city has ever produced. He gave to it his best for over forty years. Nor, with the wider field now open to Indian publicists, and the growth of a more materialistic spirit, is he ever likely to find a successor . . . . It is a truism to say that no man in this world is indispensable. It is a humbling lesson to see how rapidly the places of the most distinguished men are filled. But with these thoughts before us, it is equally true to say that Sir Pherozeshah's place in the life of Bombay will never be filled . . . . We all feel the poorer by his death. The dauntless patriot and the eminent citizen will never be replaced; outside these great activities, thousands will mourn the death of a good friend and a very likeable man, one who fought hard,

but fought fair, one who nourished a robust faith in the Empire and in the future of India in the Empire, and one who gave the best years of his life to the service of his country, and to the city which he was largely instrumental in raising to the status of the best-governed in India and the second in the Empire."

With this noble tribute ringing in our ears, let us pass on to the remarkable memorial meeting of the citizens of Bombay which provided a fitting culmination to the demonstrations of popular feeling which marked the death of Pherozeshah. It was held on the 10th December, 1915, in the *pandal* which had been erected for the forthcoming session of the Congress. It was felt that the Town Hall would prove too small for an occasion which was expected to bring together the citizens in their thousands, and the surmise turned out to be only too true. Seldom has Bombay witnessed such an imposing demonstration of popular regard. Long before the hour fixed for the meeting, the spacious *shamiana* was filled by a gathering of well over 10,000 people, representative of every community and interest, affording among other things a striking exhibition of the cosmopolitan life of Bombay. Lord Willingdon was in the chair, and supporting him on the platform were Lady Willingdon, the Gaekwad of Baroda and a dis-

tinguished company of leading citizens from all parts of the Presidency.

At the outset, the Chairman read a telegram from Lord Hardinge, who, with his deep sympathy and personal touch with every healthy popular movement, desired to associate himself with the people of Bombay on this occasion. The message spoke of Pheroza Shah as "a great Parsi, a great citizen, a great patriot and a great Indian" whom India could ill afford to lose, especially in the difficult times through which she was passing. It was a tribute which did honour to Lord Hardinge equally as to the illustrious dead. The speech of Lord Willingdon was characteristically felicitous and generous in tone. It was marked by sympathy and true insight, and struck a personal note which admirably suited the occasion :—

"I remember very well when I first came to Bombay, having little acquaintance with Indians and no knowledge of Indian life, I had formed the impression that I should find in Sir Pheroza Shah Mehta, the principal and most powerful opponent of Government in its efforts to carry on the administration of the Presidency. But what has been my experience? I found in him a strong and resourceful opponent if he thought we were wrong, a warm and loyal

supporter if he thought we were right, a fearless critic in his public life, but one who never allowed his public disagreement to interfere with his personal friendship. And in his private life, I always found him a true and loyal friend, a courteous gentleman, a man whom I have good reason to know was full of the warmest deepest human sympathy. By his death I feel a real sense of personal loss, and if that be so, how much greater must the loss be to all of you who knew him so well, who had felt the influence of his powerful personality, and who can realize far better than I what strenuous and devoted work he did during the three score years and ten of his life for the welfare of his fellowmen ? ”

The principal resolution was moved by Sir Narayan Chandavarkar, and gave suitable expression to the magnitude of the loss which the country and the Presidency had sustained by the death of Pherozeshah. The mover, in a speech charged with strong emotionalism, spoke of his departed friend as “the Prince of Bombay citizenship,” and as an imperialist imbued with the best and noblest traditions and genius of the British race and Empire. Sir Thomas Birkett, then Mr. Birkett, who followed him, speaking on behalf of the British mercantile community, referred to his magnetic

personality, great eloquence and untiring devotion to the interests of the City, and characterized his death as a national calamity. Sir Ibrahim Rahimtulla declared that one of the greatest services which Pherozeshah had rendered to the British Empire was the strenuous effort he always made to guide the political aspirations of the people in healthy channels in a spirit of far-sighted wisdom. Mr. H. A. Wadya spoke next. He had known Pherozeshah ever since with the hopes and ambitions of youth they had set out together to fight the battle of life some fifty years before. He spoke of the great gifts which had given Pherozeshah a power and a personality which very few, perhaps, had ever approached, but which no one had surpassed in the country. He had exalted civic life in public estimation, and had set an example of civic virtue that would be of permanent benefit to every city in every province and presidency. In the field of politics, the speaker continued, if it was the case that the better mind of India looked with increased confidence and higher hope to the future of the country under British rule, there was no leader to whom greater credit was due for this result than Pherozeshah. There was not a cause he espoused, nor an institution he served which he had not left the better and the stronger for his life's labours.

A number of other speeches followed. The list was long and imposing, and included many men who

had attained to distinction in various walks of life. They rang different changes on the same theme, but each spoke with a feeling which seemed to be personal. Sir Stanley Reed, the gifted editor of *The Times of India*, whose remarkable tribute in the columns of his paper bore testimony to the warmth of his admiration, remarked on the ardent patriotism, the keen political sagacity, the dynamic force and the mental alertness which were so intensely characteristic of Pherozeshah's life and work. Dr. Mackichan who followed spoke of the immense debt which the University owed to the great Elphinstonian, and the "massive influence" he exercised, "arising as it did from a strong personality enriched by an experience which was gained through strenuous labour and reinforced by strength of conviction and eloquence in expression."

Though the meeting was long and protracted, and some of the speeches could not be heard at the far end of the vast *pandal*, the proceedings throughout were marked by a solemnity and depth of feeling befitting the occasion. On that very platform, a fortnight later, the familiar figure would have been seen, and the deep voice would have thundered to the delight of thousands of India's sons. But death had snatched him away, and the citizens of Bombay had gathered not to listen to him, but to do honour to his memory, and to go through the strange experience of having a public meeting without him. The

thought seemed reflected in the mood of the audience, and added impressiveness to the proceedings. As a demonstration of popular feeling, the meeting was altogether unique. Never had Bombay seen such a gathering of her citizens. Never had Bombay witnessed on a public platform so many of her most distinguished leaders of various communities and political creeds, all anxious to pay homage to one who was by common consent the greatest of her sons. It was a tribute worthy of the City, and of the man who had devoted to her for more than forty years all that was best in him, and who had enriched and exalted her public life, and had raised her to the proud position of the first city in India and the second in the Empire.



## FINAL.

FIVE years have rolled by since Pherozechah Mehta passed away, five eventful years during which many of the ideals and principles which he upheld have gone into the melting pot. What would his position have been, if he had been alive in the bewildering times through which we are passing? Would he have lived to see his power and authority shaken, if not destroyed, and his name dragged through the mud like that of many an honoured colleague, or, would his personality have succeeded in keeping at bay, at least in his own stronghold, the onrushing forces which threaten to drive the country to the brink of a precipice? These are speculations which may be pursued with interest, but without much profit. An appreciation, however, of all that the man was and all that he stood for may help us to a right understanding of the place he occupied in the political life of India, and the position in which he would have stood to-day had he been still amongst us.

In considering Pherozechah's public career, it is essential to remember that a great many of his principles were fixed by his early training and

environment. He had the good fortune to receive his education at the hands of a scholar of great attainments and singular breadth of view. When he went to England, it was with a mind fully equipped to receive the ideas and impressions which the West has to convey. While studying for the Bar, he came under the influence of Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji, who inspired him with his own burning love of country and enthusiasm for the cause of progress and liberty. The young disciple was deeply interested in the world around him, and studied the social and political forces that were at work. He became imbued with the old-fashioned Liberalism of Gladstone and Bright, and his faith in its principles remained unimpaired to the end, despite many disappointments. It was an era of 'intrepid effort forward' in many directions of human activity,—'an agitated and expectant age,' as Mr. Gladstone called it—and its teachings deeply impressed themselves on his youthful mind.

Pherozeshah's temperament, equally with his early training, was a great asset. He was a robust optimist, and he faced the problems of the day with serene courage and confidence. The hatred of enemies, the indifference of friends and the hostility of those in power and authority failed to shake his faith in the ultimate triumph of the cause he had espoused, and in the methods and principles

by which he was guided. As he repeatedly said, he always sought hope and consolation in the words of the poet :

“ I have not made the world,  
And He that has made it will guide.”

His literary tastes fostered the spirit of hopefulness by which he was inspired. Dickens, Thackeray, Tennyson and the Bible were his favourites, and he carried these old friends with him wherever he went. In a conversation which he had shortly before his death with Sir Narayan Chandavarkar, he said : “ There is some solace in life, isn't there, when you call a small company of books like that your friends who have stood by you all through ?” Referring to Tennyson, he went on to observe :—

“ *Locksley Hall* is my favourite: in *Locksley Hall and Sixty Years After*, you miss the fire and hopefulness and courage; it sounds like an old man's tale of murmur that the world has not behaved well with him . . . . I prefer the Tennyson of *Locksley Hall*, the poet of youth and middle age with a hopeful outlook on life, who saw the vision of the world and all the wonder that would be.”

It was this cheery optimism which sustained Pherozeshah through all the difficulties and disappointments of his long and arduous career. It

sustained him through the early struggles of the Congress, when he and his associates had to contend with hostility and ridicule on the one hand, and indifference and backsliding on the other. It sustained him through the dark and anxious days which followed the Partition of Bengal, when despair and despondency seized men's minds, and turned them aside from the paths of peaceful evolution. It sustained him through the grave crisis in national affairs precipitated by the *debacle* at Surat. Through all these difficult and often critical situations, while other men shrank back or wavered, he never lost heart, never felt shaken in his allegiance to the ideals and principles which he had made his own.

He was a firm believer in the benefits of the British connection. He regarded it as something in the nature of a divine dispensation. No man more mercilessly exposed the defects, blunders and injustice which have often characterized the British administration of India, no man more courageously fought for the enlargement of the rights and liberties of the people. And yet, there was none who upheld the British connection more stoutly than he, recognizing as he did the weakness of his country's position, and the essential justice and humanity, despite many lapses, of England's rule in India. Allied to this, was his deep-seated respect for consti-

tuted authority, which his early training had implanted in him. This was most strikingly exemplified in his civic career. While there was no critic more dreaded than the Leader of the House, the executive officers had no warmer supporter of their prestige and authority.

The distinguishing traits of Pherozeshah's methods of controversy were fearlessness, a keen sense of fair play and a regard for the decencies of public life. He hit out with refreshing vigour. His denunciations were singularly free from mere aggressiveness, cheap rhetoric and sonorous platitudes. His strength lay in the directness and uncompromising independence with which he expressed himself. From the days of Sir James Westland with his famous outburst about the introduction of the 'new spirit,' officials in the Councils learnt to treat their formidable opponent with wholesome respect. Sometimes, however, they allowed their irritation to overcome them and to lead them to personal attacks, as was done by Sir Fredrick Lely and Mr. Logan in the Bombay Council on occasions well remembered by all who witnessed the encounter. They never ventured to repeat the experiment, for the trouncing they got was not easily to be forgotten. And yet, in spite of the fact that Pherozeshah spent all his life in giving and receiving hard blows, he did not allow his sense of fair play to be

blunted. He never hit below the belt. On the rare occasions on which he allowed himself to be carried away into making a hasty statement, he withdrew it as soon as his attention was drawn to its unfairness. He scrupulously observed the best traditions of public life, and was not wanting in generous appreciation of his opponents, whenever the occasion demanded it. The readiness with which he acknowledged their good intentions, and met all attempts at co-operation or conciliation was in striking contrast to the general tendencies of the time.

The maturity of thought he showed at an early age was remarkable. The views which he expressed on educational problems when quite a young man were the views from which he found no occasion to differ throughout his long career, and they invite comparison with his latest reflections on the subject. His thoughts on municipal reform when he was barely twenty-five betray the same maturity of mind, and might be said to be actually embodied in a municipal constitution which in its essentials has survived for fifty years. So also with his views on reforms in the Civil Service, and the benefits of India's participation in party politics. In all this, he was often largely in advance of his times, and in conflict with the opinions of men much older than himself and more experienced.

Perhaps, that which contributed most to Pherozeshah's supremacy in public affairs was the fact that he had a long vision and was almost always in the right. His political flair was something remarkable. And why was he able to see further than any of his contemporaries? It was because he went to the heart of things, and took his stand on principles. His career provides innumerable instances—his views on the Press Act and the South African problem are among the most recent—of his political sagacity, and the almost uncanny gift he had of forming a right judgment on questions of policy. It was largely owing to the recognition of this fact that his colleagues very often subordinated their judgment to his, and gave in even when they felt convinced he was in the wrong. As invariably happened, they found later that his eye was quicker, his aim was surer.

For those who would lead their fellow-men through the dust and heat of political controversies, a certain gift of speech is more or less essential. Pherozeshah possessed it in ample measure. His oratory was characterized by considerable variety. The sonorous eloquence of his set speeches had a mid-Victorian flavour. It delighted the crowds who hung on his words in the Congress or the Town Hall. But his strength did not lie in that. There were other men, notably Sir

Surendranath Bannerji and Mr. Lal Mohun Ghosh, who excelled him in eloquence, whose flights of oratory could sweep men off their feet. None, however, approached him, except at a respectful distance, in powers of debate, in the swift, decisive and masterly manner in which he floored an opponent. Quick to see the weak points of the case against him, he brought to bear on them all the resources of a capacious and well-trained intellect, and banter and ridicule generally finished what arguments left unaccomplished. Men felt themselves helpless as they listened to him and got convinced, sometimes against the evidence of their own senses. Thus it was he bore down all opposition, whether on the floor of the University and the Corporation Hall, or in the Subjects Committee of the Congress, where he encountered some of the finest intellects in the country. People spoke of him as an autocrat, forgetting that it could not well be otherwise in the case of a man who towered head and shoulders above almost all his contemporaries. For our part, when we see so many lesser men trying to lay down the law, we can only marvel at the moderation with which, on the whole, Pherozeshah wielded the immense power which he enjoyed.

An ardent lover of progress and liberty, Pherozeshah was strongly conservative in his outlook on some of the problems of the day. The love



of ordered progress which his well-balanced mind and early training instilled into him, made him averse to all violent or sudden changes. Deeply imbued with the teachings of English history, he had a profound reverence for constitutional forms, and an abiding faith in the virtue of gradual and peaceful evolution, of "freedom slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent." Always making the most of what he got, even if, as invariably happened, it fell short of what he had fought for, he set himself immediately to prepare for the next advance. He never worried about the distant goal, but strove only for what he thought the country was prepared for and had a right to demand, never doubting it would achieve its lofty destiny in the process of time.

He was far and away the greatest political leader India has ever seen. He never appealed to the masses as did Dadabhai Naoroji or Tilak, for instance. His hold was mainly over the educated classes and those who led them. His impressive presence, personality and powers of mind dominated all who worked with him or followed his lead. As was observed of Gladstone, "when he spoke, he uplifted debate from whatever rut of mediocrity it may have fallen into. That was the power of the orator. When he sat silent, his mere presence communicated to the House a sense of dignity and a moral strength easier to feel than to describe.

That was the quality of the man." It was remarkable how the many gifted men with whom he was associated in various spheres of public life allowed their will and judgment to be subordinated to his. The wail of the Punjab delegate that his personality dominated everybody faithfully represented the feelings of those who often differed from him, and yet found themselves helpless in his presence.

This supremacy becomes all the more remarkable when we think of the men over whom it was exercised. There were some who were in no way inferior to him in vigour of intellect ; there were others who closely rivalled him in gifts of speech and independence of character. There was none, however, who combined in him so many of the qualities which compel the admiration and command the allegiance of one's fellow-men, and in that, apart from that undefinable something called personality, must be found an explanation of Pherozezshah's dominance over all who came in contact with him. There were many men who amused themselves in his later days with instituting comparisons between him and Mr. Gokhale. Nothing could have been more foolish. As well might one compare Mazzini with Cavour. The truth is that each did work complementary to that of the other, and what the other was probably not capable of accomplishing. Gokhale certainly

could not have roused, as well as Pherozeshah did, the intelligentsia of the country from the apathy and even hostility with which a large section of it regarded the national movement. Gokhale could not have stood up as resolutely and as courageously as Pherozeshah against injustice, oppression and autocracy. On the other hand, Pherozeshah was temperamentally incapable of the active and sustained educative work which Gokhale did from day to day, and the propaganda he carried on both in England and in India, and which owed its success as much to his high character as to his attainments. Comparisons between two such men are meaningless. Each was great in his own sphere, and together they have made the New India of which Dadabhai Naoroji laid the foundations nearly fifty years ago.

The question has often been asked, what would Pherozeshah have done had he been alive to-day? Over and over again in these five years have his speeches and writings been recalled by Extremists and Moderates alike, and curiously enough both sets of political opinions have claimed him as their own. In that, perhaps, one may find an explanation of his real position in politics. In his optimism, in his faith in the benefits of the British connection, and in his firm adherence to the methods of constitutional agitation, he belonged to the Moderates. In the vigour of his utterances, in the uncompro-

missing independence of his attitude towards questions of principle, and in the tenacity and fearlessness with which he fought, he was a man after the heart of the Extremist. It is impossible to believe that with a leader of such eminence, the Moderate Party would have been what it is to-day, a sober and healthy element, no doubt, yet wanting in the fire and energy which alone make for power and influence. It is equally impossible to think that the Extremist Party could have captured the youth of the nation, and won it over to a gospel of bitter antagonism, if not worse, had a leader of Pherozeshah's authority and consummate art in the management of men been alive to sound the note of reason and true statesmanship. That he would have been an uncompromising opponent of Mr. Gandhi's political philosophy—barring, of course, its negative aspect of raising the moral tone of the nation by teaching it discipline and self-sacrifice—no one can doubt. A fighter all his life for progress and reform, he would have refused to subscribe to a doctrine which seeks to cure the ills of society by a reversion to the primitive mode of life; which propagates boycott of a system of education that has produced our greatest men—including Mr. Gandhi himself—and given strength and reality to our demands, and which boycott is calculated to divert the energies of the best of India's manhood from

those forms of fruitful activities which have made for national progress in all ages and climes. Adherents of the Non-Co-operation movement with that ingenuity which seeks to draw parallels from holy books and ancient history may point to Pherozeshah's exit from the Council chamber at the time of the passing of the Land Revenue Amendment Bill. It was, however, not an expression of helplessness, but a form of protest calculated to impress people by its novelty, and draw pointed attention to the harshness and iniquity of the measure. The author of that idea would have been the last man to acquiesce in its extension to any and every form and expression of political activity, with its attendant paralysis of national life.

As Disraeli's biographer has remarked, "there is no need to labour further what is written broadly over the record which has been here presented." More and more as the years roll by, we realize the magnitude of the loss which India has sustained by the death of one who was unquestionably the greatest political leader she has ever known; more and more we appreciate the value of the work he did for the City and the Country at large. Disliked and dreaded alike by those in authority, and by the enemies of progress on healthy and constitutional lines, he was, indeed, a mighty influence for good in our political and civic life. As we look around and contemplate the general disintegration

that has taken place since he "laid down his part in the shows of the world's huge stage," and as we think of the man who held the reins of power in his hands for more than a generation, and dominated every phase of our public life, it is to be overwhelmed with a feeling that we have lost indeed a giant among men.

"He was a man, take him for all in all,  
We shall not look upon his like again."

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